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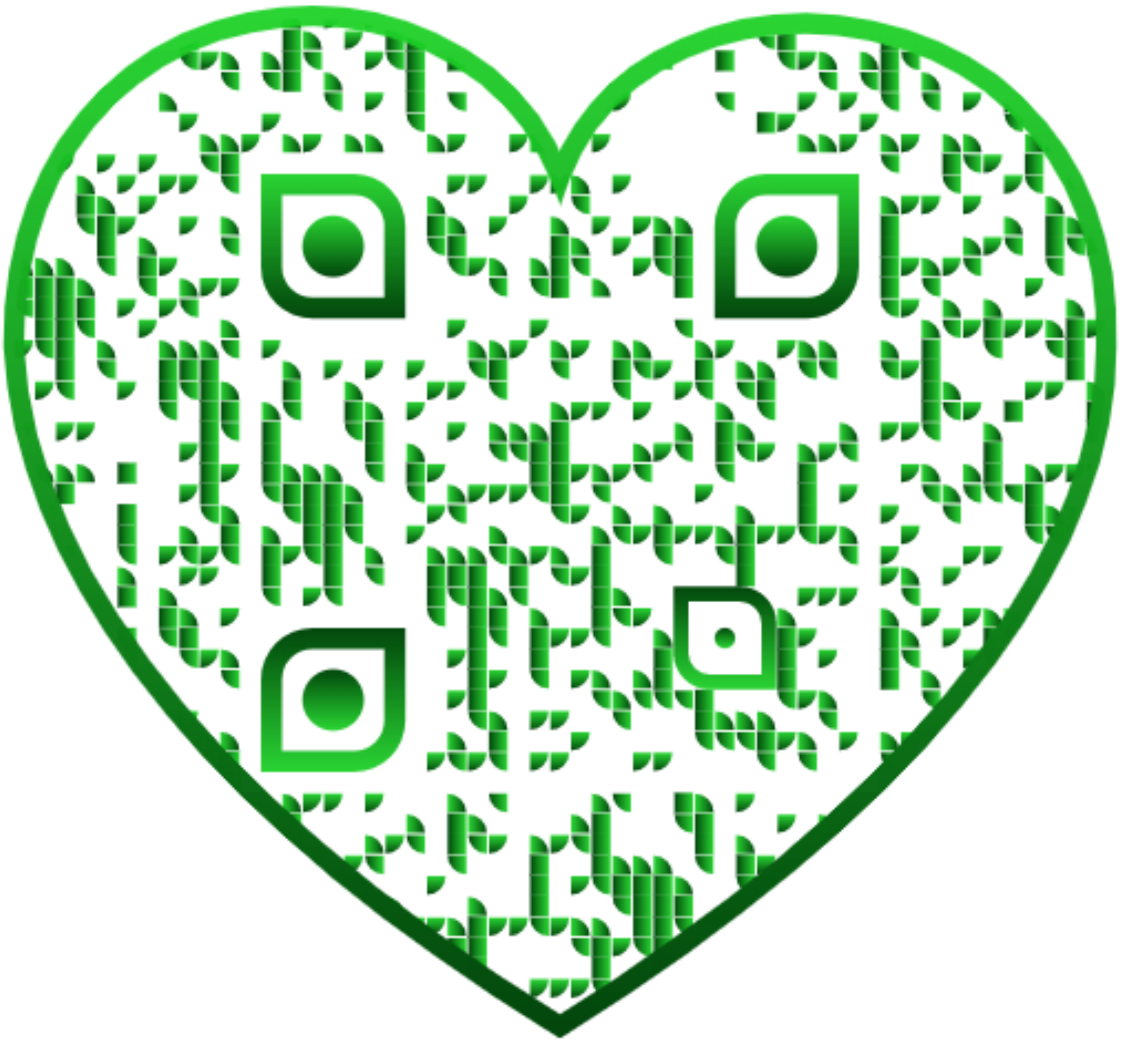
Volume 15, Number 6 September/October 2011



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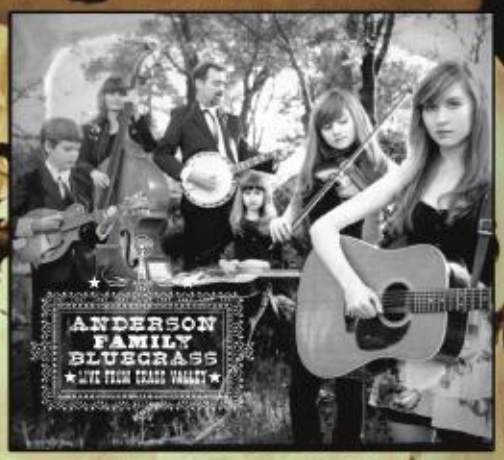

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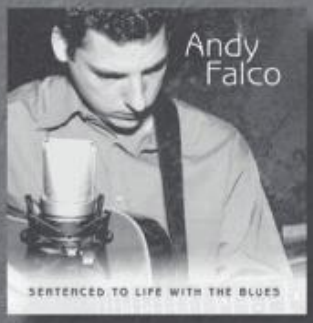

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Flatpicking Essentials, Volume 6 is divided into two main sections. The first section is Part II of our study of improvisation. Volume 5 introduced readers to a step-by-step free-form improv study method that we continue here in Volume 6.

The second section of this book is focused on advanced flatpicking technique. We approached this topic by first having Tim May record "advanced level" improvisations for nineteen different flatpicking tunes. Tim selected the tunes and went into the studio with a list of techniques, like the use of triplets, natural and false harmonics, note bending, quoting, alternate tuning, syncopation, twin guitar, minor key tunes, hybrid picking, advanced crosspicking, string skipping, etc. There are a ton of absolutely awesome flatpicking arrangements by Tim May in this book, with explanations of each technique.

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Flatpicking Essentials Volume 7: Advanced Rhythm & Chord Studies

Flatpicking Essentials, Volume 7 is a 170 page book, with 67 audio tracks, that will show you how to add texture, variety, and movement to your rhythm accompaniment in the context of playing bluegrass, fiddle tune music, folk music, acoustic rock, Western swing, big band swing, and jazz. The best part of this book is that it doesn't just present you with arrangements to memorize. It teaches you how you can create and execute your own accompaniment arrangements in a variety of musical styles. Don't rely on the arrangements of others, learn a straight-forward and gradual approach to designing your own rhythm accompaniment.

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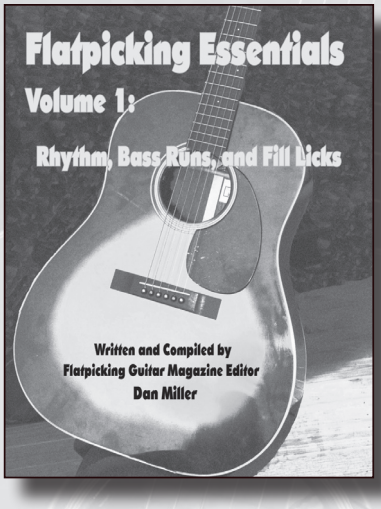

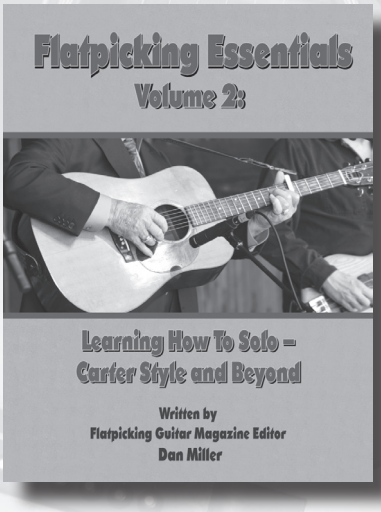

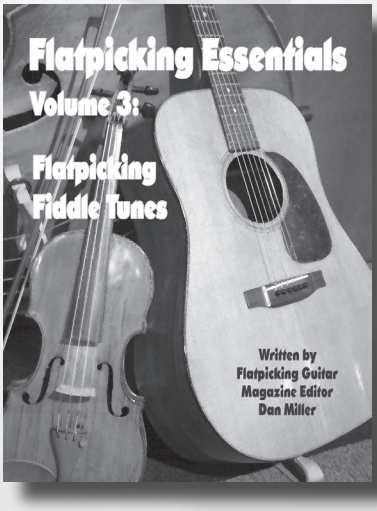

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EDITOR'S PAGE

15 Years and 90 Issues!

This edition marks the end of our 15th year of publication and the production of our 90th issue! I'd like to thank everyone who has been with us over the years — our columnists, our reviewers, our featured artists, and our subscribers. We couldn't have done it without you! So many people come up to me at festivals and say, "I've been with you guys since the first issue!" Well, I really appreciate you folks that have stayed with us over the years. There is no way we could have accomplished what we have done without your support!

Although it has been fifteen years since I started publishing this magazine, in many respects I feel like we are still just getting started. We have a lot of great material planned for the future, many more incredible guitar players to feature, and a number of interesting and informative special issues in store for you. So, now that we've reached the end of our 15th year I want thank you for your support in the past and I look forward to spending many more years with you in the future!

A special thanks for this issue goes out to Mickey Abraham. Mickey has worked very hard on this issue's cover story on Grant Gordy. He has gone above and beyond with his in-depth interview and his writing out of the tune "Channel One." And while I'm at it, I'd like to also thank Mickey for authoring our free monthly email newsletter lesson each month. Mickey works hard to get you that lesson every month and he does it for no pay. Many, many thanks Mickey!

Flatpicking Workshops

Tim May and I will be very busy on the workshop circuit this fall. In October we will be in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California teaching workshops at various music stores. Then, at the end of October we will wind up at the a bluegrass festival in Tucson, Arizona. We teach a workshop at the festival and then we head out on an eastward path in November that will lead us through New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Tennessee, and Georgia. So, if you live in any of these states, please check our schedule on our workshop website: www.flatpick.com/workshops. We would love to see you at one of our workshop events!

If you have any questions about our workshops, or would like to inquire about us coming to your town, please contact me: dan@flatpick.com

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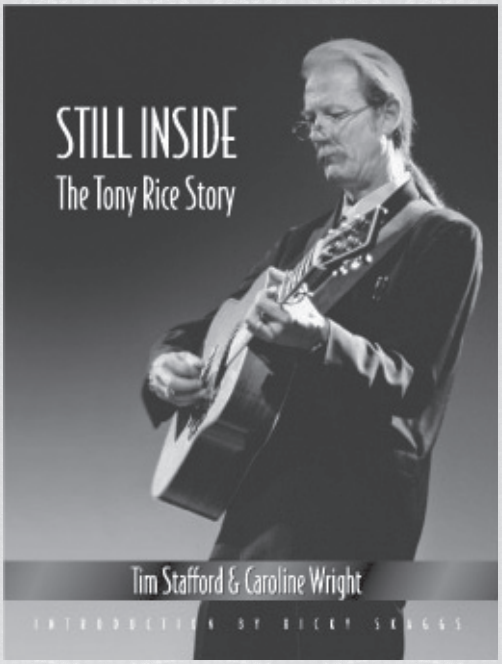
Now Available! Two New Biographical Books covering flatpicking guitar's two most influential performers: Tony Rice and Doc Watson!

Still Inside:
The Tony Rice Story
by Tim Stafford & Caroline Wright



A decade in the making, Still Inside: The Tony Rice Story delivers Tony's tale in his own inimitable words, and in anecdotes and observations from his friends, family, fans, and fellow musicians.

Tony's long road has taken him from coast to coast and around the world, through historic recordings and appearances that often profoundly move those who experience them. More than 100 people were interviewed for this book, sharing memories of Tony and discussing his indelible impact on their own music. Alison Krauss, J.D. Crowe, Sam Bush, Béla Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Ricky Skaggs, David Grisman, Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, Peter Rowan, and many others contribute intimate stories and frank observations of this private, enigmatic man.

In the book's final chapter, co-author Tim Stafford—a highly respected acoustic guitarist in his own right—provides insight into Tony's technique, timing, right hand, choice of picks, and much more. Tim also discusses Tony's prize possession, the 1935 Martin D-28 Herringbone guitar formerly owned by the great Clarence White.

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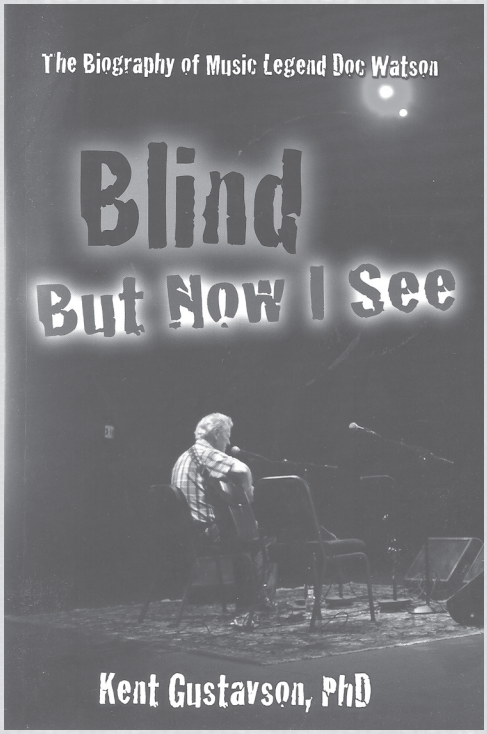

Blind But Now I See:
The Biography of Music Legend Doc Watson
by Kent Gustavson

From the day he stepped off the bus in New York City, North Carolina music legend Doc Watson changed the music world forever. His influence has been recognized by presidents and by the heroes of modern music, from country stars to rock and roll idols. This is a biography of a flatpicking legend.

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- Ketch Secor of Old Crow Medicine Show
- Pat Donohue of The Prairie Home Companion
- David Grisman of Garcia/Grisman and Old and in the Way
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- Guy Clark, Texas Songwriting Legend
- Michelle Shocked, Greg Brown, Mike Marshall, Tom Paxton, Maria Muldaur
- And many more!

Both Books are Available at www.flatpickingmercantile.com

Photo by Lauren Blair

Grant Gordy

If you follow rising Nashville guitarists, chances are you may not have heard the music of Grant Gordy. He's not busy backing up Nashville stars or appearing on CMT's music awards. Rather, he spends his time composing acoustic masterpieces, transcribing Coltrane, and jamming at jazz clubs—that is, when he's not reinventing Dawg music as the guitarist in the world famous David Grisman Quintet (DGQ).

I had the privilege to interview Grant for *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* for the July/August 2008 issue. Back then, I wanted to find out how he first learned to play and how he entered the new acoustic music scene, which at the time was loaded with other up-and-coming young acoustic players such as Sarah Jarosz, Alex Hargreaves, and Dominick Leslie. For this cover story, I wanted to go a little deeper. My goal here is to de-mystify some of Grant's musical philosophies and offer some insight into his relationship with music as told by himself and those musicians closest to him. In many ways, his approach to music is the antithesis of the Nashville mainstream country music scene that sometimes finds itself feeling more like a high school popularity contest than an artistically-inviting musical hot bed.

A flatpicking master in his own right, Grant has quickly evolved into an underground acoustic guitar legend. His flatpicking music is audio art and his dedication to the craft is inspiring. Grant's compositions and improvised solos exhibit elements of all forms of music, yet always seem to have one foot firmly planted in tradition. It's a sound I have always wanted to hear; a player who truly understands the subtlety and nuance of "Wildwood Flower" while at the same time pushes the boundaries of new-age improvisation and tonal possibilities. It's the well thought-out combination of the two that gives Grant his creative edge.

by Mickey Abraham

As a member of the DGQ, Grant is following in the footsteps of mystical acoustic guitar icons like John Carlini, Tony Rice, Mike Marshall, Mark O'Connor, and Frank Vignola. For fans of the Dawg music catalogue, it's very comforting to hear Grant borrow guitar philosophies from these luminaries by quoting their ideas off of classic recordings. Like earlier masters, he adds his own unique flavor. Grant is clearly showing his mastery of the music as well as respect for the former guitarists.

When I first interviewed Grant for *FGM* in 2008, Frank Vignola was still the guitarist in the DGQ. Grisman was using Grant to fill in when Vignola, due to his busy schedule, couldn't make a gig. Since that time, Grant has moved into the DGQ guitarist position full time, and has also released his first solo album entitled *Grant Gordy* which might be the most significant instrumental newgrass guitar album since Tony Rice released *Backwaters* in 1982.

Defining Dawg Music

In order to fully understand Grant's approach to music, I feel it is important to have a basic idea of what this whole "Dawg" music thing is all about. At first, "Dawg" was a nickname given to David Grisman very early on in his career by longtime friend and fellow bluegrass musician, Jerry Garcia. Both men felt great inspiration from Bill Monroe, the father of bluegrass, when he would talk about inventing a style of music. As the years went on, Garcia's music, as many of you know, came to be known as the "Dead" style of music named after his band, the Grateful Dead. Meanwhile, Grisman's mandolin-driven instrumental-acoustic fusion came to be known as "Dawg music." After years of listening to it, and with the help of those who have helped create it, I have come to understand some of the characteristics that would classify a piece of music as Dawg music.

Stemming from the musical vision of mandolin demigod David Grisman, Dawg music is a fusion of acoustic genres (mostly bluegrass, jazz, swing, Latin, and Gypsy) that pays homage to tradition, but at the same time is rooted in improvisational creativity. Next, in order for a sound to be considered a style, it must have imitators. Not only have many musicians written in the style of Grisman, but some simpler Dawg tunes have actually become jam session standards.

Throughout the past forty years, many great musicians have helped bring Grisman's musical vision to life, and being a member of the DGQ almost ensures a prolific career in acoustic music. Tony Rice, Mike Marshall, Darol Anger, Todd Phillips, and Joe Craven are among the names of acoustic masters that have left their musical mark in the history of Dawg music. Great musicians have come and gone as members of DGQ, but the band's mission has always remained the same; respect for tradition, creative improvisation, and breakfast at Cracker Barrel.

The combination of bluegrass and jazz elements Grant Gordy brings to the band, especially at this point in the band's 40 year history, makes him the quintessential Dawg guitarist. His comprehension of Grisman's music and his approach to flatpicking ensures that the sound continues to evolve in a way that is true to the history of Dawg guitar. Grant's overall hip vibe has the ability to introduce the DGQ and their music to a whole new generation of acoustic music fans.

The Interview

After having my mind blown listening to Grant's album, *Grant Gordy*, I came up with a list of questions that I knew, if answered thoroughly, would unlock some of the mystical qualities of Grant's playing. I recommend that you read some of Grant's answers more than once to fully absorb his well constructed responses.

I was honored to see how much Grant had to offer on each question and it validated his work ethic and passion for his craft. In some ways, even with his lengthy responses, I feel he was holding back, wanting to offer more insight than I have space available in this issue. The following is an almost completely unedited interview from inside the mind of a player who, to me, when it's all said and done, will be one of the most prolific guitarists of our time.

To you, how similar are flatpicking and bluegrass to jazz?

For me, the styles have a lot of components that are similar. Or, perhaps it has just as much to do with the general method I've used to explore different styles of music, which has been fairly single-minded, whether it's bluegrass or jazz.

For me, learning how to play over "Big Mon" wasn't that different than learning how to play over a Charlie Parker tune. It's just a matter of spending time with it and listening to other musicians that I respect playing it. This way, I can get a sense of the improvisational vocabulary that is being used. Then, practicing and internalizing on my own time, and getting together with other musicians that share an interest in the music to share ideas. I see that process happening both in the flatpicking and jazz worlds.

Charlie Parker's "Confirmation" has a few more chord changes than "Angeline the Baker," but the process of delving into either piece of music and learning to play them well requires all the same skills: listening, patience, a willingness to analyze what's happening melodically and harmonically, and a willingness to analyze one's own playing honestly and critically to see how it could be improved.

You can apply a lot of the concepts that one uses as a jazz improviser to improvise in bluegrass music, and vice-versa. Syncopation, strong sense of rhythm and swing, embellishing harmony with extensions, and interplay between musicians, are all used to a large degree in both styles.

To you, what makes something a "bluegrass song?" Does it have to be written by Bill? Is it the instrumentation? Is it the note choice?

Initially I would guess that instrumentation would have a lot to do with it, but I'm no authority on any style of music. There is a certain kind of role that acoustic instruments have that identifiably comprise the "bluegrass sound." The bass playing

Photo by Lauren Blair

Grant Gordy with David Grisman

Photo by Lauren Blair

Grant Gordy with Ross Martin

root-five on beats 1 and 3, mandolin chopping on 2 and 4, guitar playing open chords, high harmony singing...you get the picture.

Controversy has raged since its inception over what is and isn't "bluegrass music!" In the 60s and 70s bluegrass musicians started playing with drums and electric bass and purists complained to no end. But Bill Monroe himself recorded with drums at a time, and even had an accordion player in his band! That is why, ultimately, labels and those kinds of categorizations often end up doing a lot more harm than good.

There always has been, and always will be, a push and pull between what is considered in the tradition, what is considered pushing the boundaries of the tradition but still honoring it, and what isn't included. To loosely paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, "I can't really describe exactly what bluegrass music is, but I know it when I hear it."

How does the fretboard look different to you when playing bluegrass as opposed to jazz?

Flatpicking and fiddle tunes tend to be very diatonic music, and typically don't modulate (change keys) very much in the way jazz (especially modern jazz) tends to. It's a lot easier when playing over fiddle tunes to play your licks in the key of G or D (or whatever key you're in) and get into comfortable hand positions that we know work over a given song or chord progression. The unfortunate result of that is that often we get locked into a very visual, less inherently musical (i.e., sound-based) approach to music making; which is ironic since this music tends to be an aural tradition.

You could easily think of the II-V-I chord progression (Am, D7, Gmaj in the key of G) found in many jazz songs as the equivalent of IV-V-I (C, D, G in the key of G) found in bluegrass. That's not so different! Then you can expand from there. If a song goes I-VI-II-V (Gmaj, E7, Am, D7 in the key of G), we have an almost completely diatonic (in one key) harmonic sequence. The only thing that goes out of the key is the 3rd of the E7 chord (G#); the other three notes in the chord (E, B, D) are all found in the key of G.

So, it's good to think about ways to connect these changes. For example, playing lines that connect the common tones (G, B, D for the G chord) and uncommon tones, i.e., really bring out that G# note when we land on the E7 chord. That's the money note! Fully using the effect of this harmonic knowledge will give a solo a kind of authority that doesn't happen when we just play our "key of G" licks over the I-VI-II-V progression.

One could look at jazz (and I often do) as a similar style to something like bluegrass, just with a wider palate available in terms of the harmonic and melodic vocabulary being used. A lot of the same processes can be used to play both styles: you just need to train your ears to hear more extended chords and different melody notes, then figure out how to do it on guitar.

In both styles, one obvious difference is simply a matter of dialect. There is a vocabulary that goes along with playing bebop, just as there is in soloing or playing rhythm in a bluegrass setting. Taking the time to learn that language is important, then you have to go one step further and figure out how to do it on the guitar. Charlie Parker pioneered a style of improvisation that was fairly agreeable to play on the alto saxophone. He was hearing stuff that nobody had thought to play before. He obviously was a total, complete virtuoso and could play as technically as anyone, but that kind of improvisation, as I understand, is fairly saxophone-friendly. Not so much on guitar.

At least for me, bebop is hard to play! The guitar's tuning and sonic limitations make playing a lot of the fast lines, arpeggios, and intervalic jumps intrinsic to jazz vocabulary very challenging. So it's bound to require an adjustment. But obviously Wes Montgomery and other guitar greats did a fine job, so what excuse do I really have?!

Most soloists stick to single note ideas when improvising. Can you offer an example of how you might incorporate little chord shapes into a solo? if you can, choose a chord progression and explain one way you might use moving little chord shapes, perhaps even combined with a single note passage.

Things that I like to think about when improvising a solo include not only implying different kinds of harmony on a given chord progression (which can be done with single-note lines, chords, and double stops) but also trying to use the full range of the guitar to accompany or support myself harmonically. Then it becomes less of a rigid dichotomy between single notes and chord soloing.

Maybe I could play a little line on the B and E strings in the key of E minor, centering around the 5th scale degree, but then I might punctuate it or harmonically support it by playing an F# and A double stop on the A and D strings respectively, the way a jazz piano player might punctuate his soloing by throwing in a little chord with his left hand while playing lines with his right. The sound of the solo line is in the treble range of the guitar, but then I'm supporting it a little bit by making use of the middle register of the instrument too.

That can add a lot of dimension to the sound of a solo, especially if there's not

a lot of other harmony being laid out by other instruments. The point is to illustrate the idea of using the guitar's full range of capacities as much as I can. With multiple strings (that can be played in a lot of simultaneous combinations) and registers to work with, there are a lot of options for utilizing its harmonic capabilities.

As far as chord soloing, I like to think a lot about voice leading. That means making use of chromatic lines and chord extensions within a chord solo. For example, if playing over the progression G, E7, A7, D7, I might play a G triad (over G), then a Bb triad (emphasizing the tensions of the 7th and the b9 over the E chord, as well as a tritone relationship), then an A triad, and finally a G# triad (over D7), emphasizing the same tensions and harmonic relationship as the Bb over E.

So this is a very simple example, but I have different dimensions of ideas going on here. I have the tritone relationship happening with the VI chord and V chord, I have chord extensions being implied by the superimposition of harmony, and I have parallel chromatic voice leading happening too. It's a nice way to think about chord soloing, so you aren't stuck trying to think about all the possible options on every chord as it arises.

Can you talk about your creative use of syncopation in your music?

I've been very interested in learning about syncopation about as long as I've been playing. I remember exploring 3 over 4 groupings and simple metric modulations in a very basic intuitive way in my early years. Syncopation is to stress weak beats in a way that deviates from or interrupts the original pulse.

I can say that I find it fascinating and exciting. It is a way to think about improvisation that really doesn't have anything to do with notes! I used to listen to a lot of recordings of West African drum ensembles in my earlier days, and I feel like that purely rhythmic approach, viewing that as a complete musical entity, influenced me greatly. I've also toured playing West African music with African musicians, which I think has been really instructive too.

A lot of great jazz drummers and composers have used syncopation and/or metric modulation to great effect. Ari Hoenig is a fantastic example of a modern jazz drummer that is pushing the boundaries of what is rhythmically possible in a drum solo, as an accompanist or even compositionally (he writes great tunes).

George Marsh, the drummer with the David Grisman Quintet/Sextet, has taught me so much about rhythm over the years in the band. We really enjoy "playing with the time" onstage together. We'll be on a Grisman gig and playing little punctuations and syncopations and looking at each other out of the corner of our eyes. We really try to listen to each other a lot and try to pick up on rhythmic cues. This has, I'm sure, deeply affected the way I approach syncopation whether I'm playing with a drummer or with an all string band. Always being aware of not only what's going on with the time at a given moment, but also where it could go, is very important.

A lot of flatpickers tend to use steady eighth notes to convey a melody or improvise a solo. Can you explain a little bit about your use of space and phrasing, and how these ideas help you to create your sound.

Space is obviously a very important thing in music. A lot of great musicians have emphasized this point by being known just as much for what they don't play. Miles Davis would be a perfect example. He not only had a sound so personal that it could be identified by his playing only one note, but he also used a lot of space in his improvising to great effect. Thelonious Monk would be another good example of that, as well as David Grisman.

Coming from a background of fiddle tunes and flatpicking, there tends to be a default to constant eighth note playing, and I realized that I didn't want that to necessarily be my default as an improviser, no matter what kind of music I was doing. Space is cool because it provides contrast, and especially in an instrumental setting it's important to have contrast to offer the listener another way to stay engaged with the music. If you're filling up all the sonic space with notes and not giving a break, that's fine, that's a legitimate approach, but it's nice to have as broad a musical palette as you can to work with. Constantly playing notes without stopping is sort of like painting with a single color, and ironically you often end up leaving out a lot of possibilities by playing so much, because there isn't any room for them.

If you listen to saxophonists or other wind players improvise, they have to have space in their playing by necessity: they have to stop playing so they can breathe. I think that's a great model because paying attention to your breath keeps you tuned in with what's going on with your body, and involving your whole self in the process of improvising. It's not just about moving your fingers! There is a lot more going on with music and improvising than that.

To me, the best improvisation happens within the context of interacting and communicating really well with a group of musicians, whether it's with the David

Photo by Lauren Blair

The Grant Gordy Quartet: Dominick Leslie (L), Grant Gordy (C) and Mike Barnett (R). Not pictured is Ian Hutchison on bass.

Photo by Lauren Blair

Don Stiernberg with the David Grisman Sextet (Mike Barnett on fiddle) in Chicago at the Old Town School of Folk music April 2010.

Grisman Quintet/Sextet, my own acoustic quartet, or on a jazz gig, etc. Being aware of the group dynamic often requires leaving space just to give me time to listen to everybody else. Even if I'm the one taking a solo, the best solo is going to happen if I'm really listening and interacting with the other musicians. The rest of the band is not just a backing track for me to practice my licks over. That kind of listening will almost always force me to leave more space, rather than just going on autopilot with lots of notes. The interactive approach is extremely important to me and is really the element that brings the music to an exciting level for the musicians and the audience.

What is your usual practice routine? Has it changed over the years?

My practicing has definitely changed a lot over the years. I don't like to use the term "self-taught" because I don't feel like it is an accurate phrase, but I didn't study with anyone when I was first learning to play the guitar so I was never given any guidance on how to practice, or how to improve any specific aspect of my playing. So, over the years it's been an intuitive process with a lot of following my ear, listening to and asking questions of other musicians, listening honestly and critically to my own playing, and a lot of trial and error.

My practice tends to get divided between 1) general maintenance (i.e., the basics), 2) working on new or more advanced rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic ideas to improve my improvising vocabulary, 3) practicing some kind of repertoire for my own fun that I might not necessarily be performing and 4) practicing specific repertoire for a future engagement. If I have a Grisman gig coming up, then he'll send out the set list in advance and I'll work on those tunes a lot.

I try to really prioritize my time, too, the busier I get. I started out without a lot of discipline, and I did have to "teach myself" how to have that discipline to spend the requisite amount of time to make progress on whatever it is I need to get done. Lately I've been really into the idea of keeping a practicing journal by writing down my musical goals in order to keep them organized, making note of what I'm working on, and how much time I'm putting into each thing. I've never monitored my practicing so closely. It's a new thing so I haven't yet discovered exactly how it's changed my practicing or playing.

I've also sought out lessons with some great local and nationally-known jazz musicians (guitarists and other instrumentalists) in order to get some outside critical perspective on my playing, and in order to get new ideas for ways I can approach practicing and improving. Taking some lessons has changed my practicing a lot. It's already taught me a lot of new practice methods for the purpose of strengthening specific skills, but also I've learned about some other conceptual perspectives to have on music and practicing in general that I wouldn't have thought of on my own, which can be equally helpful and informative.

Your original music seems to combine modern improvisation with well thought out composition, can you talk about how the composed sections add to the improvised sections? What are your thoughts on composition and improvisation? How are they alike, how are they different?

I think it's very interesting, and I really like the fact that you phrased the question "how (do) the composed sections add to the improvised sections?" and not the other way around. That idea of combining through-composition (specific arrangements, controlled dynamics, etc.) with improvisation has been a very compelling idea to me since I first started composing. David Grisman's music was very influential for me in this regard, and was probably the first example I ever heard of that approach. His compositions often have just that: a compelling arrangement that the band is expected to execute at a high level of precision, along with improvisational sections which are intentionally left fairly open to the construct of the musicians in the moment. It's nothing particularly new. Duke Ellington and Count Basie's bands were playing both composition and improvisation back in the early 20th century. Miles Davis' record *Birth of the Cool* is a great example of the merging of the two, and even Bach was known to be a masterful improviser.

Both are very important, but I also don't really see them as being that different. It's often said that composition is just improvisation but slowed down, and improvisation is just composing music in real time. I think that's a very apt description. You're using all the same elements in both, and intention is extremely important for both.

It could be easy to think that sitting down and composing a piece, by its nature, is a very intentional act and has a certain gravitas that improvisation lacks, while improvisation is somehow inherently less intentional or focused because of its ephemeral nature. I contend that one does not outweigh the other in terms of the discipline required, or the depth that can be achieved. I love Bach and Debussy, sometimes for the same reasons I like Charlie Parker and Kurt Rosenwinkel. I hear a kind of beauty and logic in the music of Bach, whether it's a solo violin partita, four-part fugue, or a symphony, that I often compare to great bebop improvisers and composers. Ultimately though, the main goal, whether I'm playing a through-

composed piece or improvising completely freely, is to serve the music. That's the bottom line.

How do you prepare to take an extended improvised solo over a tune like "16/16?" Can you share some of the ideas you are thinking while soloing over those chords? How do you approach a solo to a tune like this and why?

First of all, it's very enjoyable to play a tune like "16/16," because it's nice to have an open-ended number of choruses to play over. It's more like playing a jazz tune in that sense – you have a little more room to develop ideas when there's no particular constraint on playing only once or twice through the changes. Preparing for a tune like "16/16" is mostly in getting comfortable with playing those changes. It's in the key of Gm, and you can hear that tonality in it, but it never actually resolves to the I chord in the solo section! So there's sort of this build of tension that repeatedly renews itself until you get back to the head at the end of the tune. The first chord in the solo section is Ebmaj7, which relates closely to Gm, then most of the changes can be approached from a standpoint of G Dorian, until you get to the D7 chord at the end of the form, which would most obviously be approached from G harmonic minor. That would be the simplest way to break it down in terms of what scales to play over the changes.

Lately though I've been trying to think less in terms of scales and more in terms of specific tensions on the chords, and so I might try to stress certain tensions within each chord as it arises, then superimpose other chords on top of the current chord to emphasize that sound. So for the Ebmaj7, I might think of it as an Eb Lydian sound, which is basically Eb with an F major chord on top. Or maybe I'll think of it as a Cm11, which basically translates as an Ebmaj9 sound (pretty consonant), or if it's a little further along in the piece and I want it to sound a bit more tense I might think of an Ebmaj7#5 sound, which is basically just a G major triad on top of Eb. The point is that all of those options just give you a different kind of sound to emphasize over the chord changes, which bring a different color to your sound while you're improvising. So if you have these new chord superimpositions you can arpeggiate them (or just fragments of them) or you can just use them as vehicles for melodic ideas. There are a lot of options.

As another example over the D7 chord, you can play any triad that comes from the diminished scale (D, F, Ab, or B and all their corresponding 7th and minor chords), or you could play augmented sounds (D, F#, or Bb triads). There are endless things you can play over a 7th chord.

There is a whole other side to all of this too, and that is to remember to play in a way that is responsive in the setting of the band (i.e., LISTEN!) That is extremely important. So I'm not simply thinking, "here are all of these hip substitutions I'm going to play over the changes," because that isolates me and my brain from being in the moment with the band. What if I have some idea for something that I think is hip over the D7 chord but then David plays something that contrasts with that? Or what if I want to play double-time but George (the drummer) is feeling another kind of syncopation? Usually there is an arc that the solo wants to follow that the soloist doesn't always have control over. Sometimes it's important to let the bigger sound of the band be just that, bigger than all the hip ideas I want to play, you know? So again, riding the wave of the group dynamic is super important for a tune like that.

Can you talk a bit about your thoughts on "outside" playing? You seem to often go in the direction of "outside" note choice when writing and especially when improvising.

That can be a tricky question to answer. Things that sound "out" to one person might not sound so to another. And a person's opinion of dissonance and consonance might change over time. So the line between what is "outside" and what isn't is relative. That said, it is something that I like to incorporate into improvisation and composition when it feels right, but I might have a higher tolerance for when it is "right" than the average flatpicker. It's just another sound, another option that you have for note choice. It can be based on a super-analytical perspective of knowing exactly which tension you're playing (for instance, if I play an ascending Ab major scale over a G chord starting on Ab, it will give me b9, #9, 4, b5, b6, 7, 1), or just on the idea that playing "wrong" notes (i.e., not in the scale of the key you're in) adds a color that you don't get by just playing diatonically. It's up to the user's discretion about what is appropriate at the time, which requires attention and intention as an improviser and composer.

What were your approaches to recording your album?

The musical process was very interesting. I flew Dominick Leslie, Alex Hargreaves, and Paul Kowert out to my place in Denver for a two-week period, which I was so lucky to have been able to secure – that kind of time is a real luxury! We spent a week rehearsing, both solidifying older material that was more or less in its completed state (that particular quartet had never played together before), and also trying out new ideas of mine that I had never played with anyone before. Some of the pieces on the

Photo by Lauren Blair

Grant Gordy in the Studio

record were brand new when we recorded them, as were some of the arrangement particulars on older tunes. The tune that became "Mansa Sissoko," for instance, was just an idea in my head and had no completed structure at all when the guys arrived at my home. We would also begin each day of rehearsal just freely improvising, which was a really great way to stay in a creative mindset with ourselves, each other, and the greater group context. We also composed a bit of music together during the rehearsal time. The piece "The Desert, the Ocean" is a collaborative composition and arrangement by all four of us.

At the end of our week of rehearsal, we played a radio show in the afternoon and a gig that night. The idea was to get that band in front of an audience so we could present the material in real time, feel the pressure of needing to play whatever we could get through from beginning to end, and cultivate a "band mentality" as much as possible before going in to record.

We went into the studio the very next morning, on a cold, grey January day. We continued our tradition of improvising (this time with the recorder rolling) to begin every day and got to work recording takes of the tunes we had planned. Jayme Stone came in to help with production for a couple days. We recorded for three or four long days, then took a couple days off to rehearse some more and collect more ideas, then went back in to finish off our week. It was an exhilarating and exhausting process! That was really only the beginning of the work. Editing (of which we did a fair amount), mixing, and all the rest of the things that go into finally having a finished CD comprised by far the most work I'd ever put into a single project. It was intense and very rewarding, and it lent instructive insight into the way that I play, prepare for the studio, and lead a band.

Can you name some musicians that have greatly influenced you and what you have taken from their playing?

Really, there are just too many to possibly list without leaving a lot out! Obviously David Grisman and Tony Rice for being pioneers and such important innovators in acoustic music, and for setting the standard for good time and tone. Django Reinhardt, for being an early gateway to jazz music for me and for embodying a joyousness, adventurousness and uniqueness that is really unparalleled. John Coltrane and Miles Davis, who together and separately made some of the most inspiring and profound music I've ever heard. Chris Thile, Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, Darol Anger, Charlie Parker, Bill Evans, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles, B.B. King. Three of my favorite modern jazz guitarists, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Gilad Hekselman, and Lage Lund have been providing me with so much inspiration on so many levels the last couple of years. Their harmonic understanding and melodic sensibility are so deep.

What is Dawg music?

Dawg music is David Grisman's music. I think that it combines a lot of things, but I wouldn't want to say what those things precisely amount to. It's a music that is singularly filtered through and created by Dawg's creative mind and aesthetic. You can certainly hear the bluegrass influences, the swing and jazz influences, but it isn't bound by them. He honors traditions while simultaneously bending and fusing them together. He can take the lead from a lot of different traditions, and turn the mixture into something that is authentically his own. That is a rare skill!

No FGM article would be complete without asking, "What kind of guitar do you play?"

A Matt Arcara 2010 D-21 and a Hofner Jazzica arch-top circa 2009.

Grant as a Bandmate

Although Grant is much younger than the other members in his band, his work ethic and passion for the music has earned him a great deal of respect from his bandmates, who themselves are all prolific and veteran interpreters of Dawg music. I decided to speak with long-time DGQ members Matt Eakle (flute) and Jim Kerwin (bass) to understand what it's like to work with a musician like Grant.

Kerwin's first comment about Grant was, "he was born to play Dawg music." This is quite a compliment coming from someone who has been in the band for 27 years. As Jim and I talked about Grant's role in the quintet, I came to understand their relationship as somewhat of a mentoring system. "Grant was not a child prodigy," Jim explained, "that's a whole other thing -- Grant works really hard." At times, after a show, Grant will look to Jim's 27 years of experience for positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. Kerwin then went on to say, "each guitarist (in the DGQ) has had their own thing and brought something to the band, but where Grant fits in is that he already knew all the songs, he grew up playing this stuff."

Flautist Matt Eakle has been playing and helping create Dawg music in the DGQ for 15 years and offered the following about Grant: "I have a deep respect for Grant's relationship with music. He has an old fashioned work ethic using the time-honored technique of learning from the masters, often by transcribing their solos, then incorporating their ideas into his own. All the great musicians from Bach to Monk did the same thing. Now musicians like me are learning from Grant just like he learned from Tony Rice, Pat Metheny, and Herbie Hancock, to name just a few of his influences."

Fiddle virtuoso Alex Hargreaves has been sharing music with Grant for six years. They recorded on each other's records and share many of the same musical mentors. In talking with Hargreaves about Grant, I could see why the two are such good musical friends. I found that they both have a deep respect for the lifelong study of music. When I asked Hargreaves to share one musical concept that they enjoy exploring, he mentioned that both he Grant not only share the love of fiddle music and bluegrass, but also straight jazz, bebop, and horn-driven music. Hargreaves and I both agree that one thing that makes Grant most unique is that he legitimately plays jazz on a flat-top guitar.

The Tune: Channel One

Channel One Road Map:
"A" - intro and melody
"B" - Latin feel melody
"C" - solo 1 vamp (fiddle)
"D" - solo 2 vamp (mandolin)
"E" - solo 3 vamp (guitar)
"F" - outro melody and tag

When Grant told me he wanted to include a transcription of Channel One for this issue, I agreed wholeheartedly. Written in a style reminiscent of the early collaborations of David Grisman and Darol Anger, Channel One is an acoustic masterpiece that combines many of the ideas Grant referenced in the interview. It includes elements of tightly-arranged full band composition as well as sections that are left open for extended improvised solos. Furthermore, it exhibits several guitar techniques that are very typical of Grant's unique style.

It should go without saying that Channel One is in not your typical AABB fiddle tune. You can think of this piece as having six parts. The "intro" begins with a solo mandolin riff in 7/4 time. I have notated this main mandolin riff for guitar. Next, the 7/4 line is repeated as the full band enters with an A to Bm groove (:07). Grant plays this piece with a capo on the second fret, so the guitar shapes would be G to Am. The "A" section is one of the main themes of the piece (:12). On the recording, the mandolin and fiddle twin this odd-metered melody but I have transcribed the "A" section theme for capo II guitar.

Next, the "B" section transitions into a cool latin feel, leaving more space with the melody (:50). The "B" section ends with a descending line landing on a funky B7#9 (1:15). At this point, the tune breaks wide open into the first solo section. The "C" section vamp is made up of Em7 to A7 four times and then G to A7 (a A/G sound) four times. This is where Grant and his bandmates really shine. Their knowledge of music theory enables them to play chord extensions that sound convincing in both the lead and rhythm. Check out the amazing fiddle solo Alex Hargreaves plays over this groove on the recording (1:17-2:15). I especially like when Hargreaves quotes the head at 1:46. In the back-up, Grant is exploring chord voicings and syncopating the groove. The "C" section solo ends with the main theme that transitions beautifully into the second solo, or "D" section (2:19).

The "D" section is a 7/4 groove that again has a specific chord progression but is melodically left open to improvisation. I encourage you to listen to Dominick Leslie's incredible 7/4 mandolin solo on the recording (2:20-3:05). This 7/4 groove is so convincing, I did not know it was an odd meter until Grant sent me the charts! Try feeling the 7/4 pulse in one group of four and one group of three. The "D" section concludes with a descending line landing on a hip F7#11 that transitions into Grant's guitar solo over the "C" section chords. Are you confused yet? Think of Grant's solo as the "E" section, and parts "C" and "E" have the same chords (3:09).

If you are wondering why Grant Gordy is on the Cover of FGM, just listen to his improvised solo over the "E" section groove and you will hear why! I especially want to draw your attention to where Grant plays an F# triad idea over the G to A groove (3:47), creating what Grant called the "Chick Corea Chord". After Grant's solo, the tune restates the 7/4 mandolin riff and enters a final composed section that concludes the piece (4:45). To save space on the page, all the outro themes that are "repeats" from other sections have been left out. After the "E" section you would play measures 42-47 to get out of the solo, then restate measures 1-9. Next, insert the "Interlude Lick" from measures 64-68 before the "Tag Ending" that begins at measure 84. I have notated all of the composed melodies and themes for capo II guitar, while the improvised sections have been left open to interpretation.

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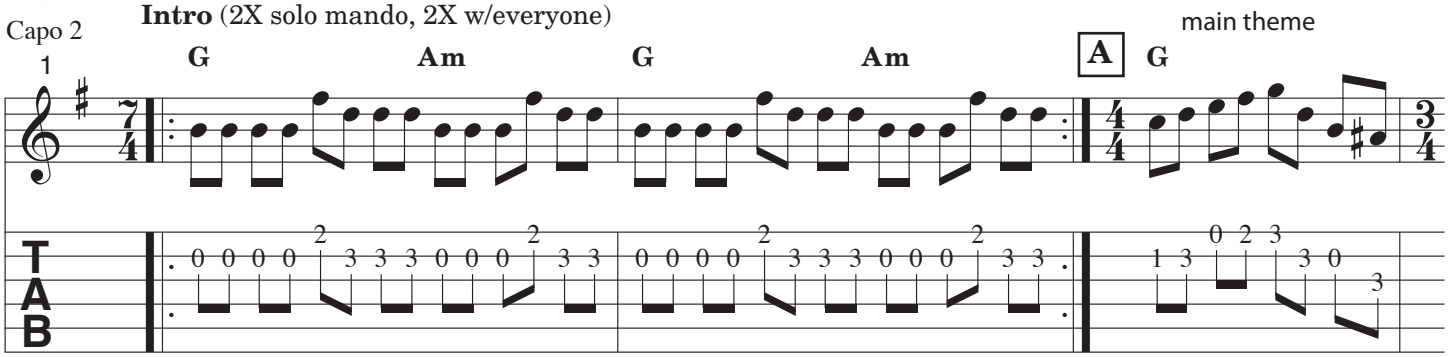
Audio CD
Track 2

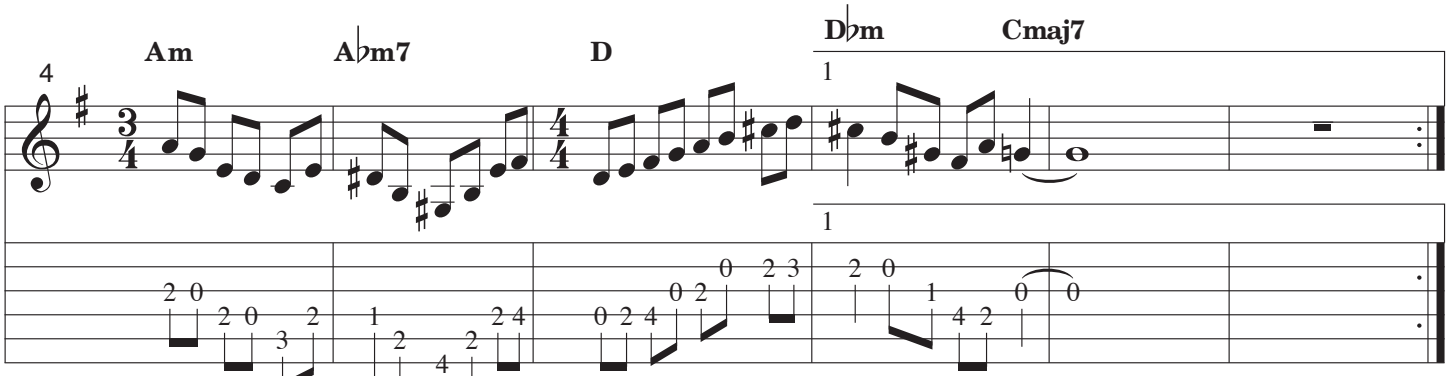
Channel One

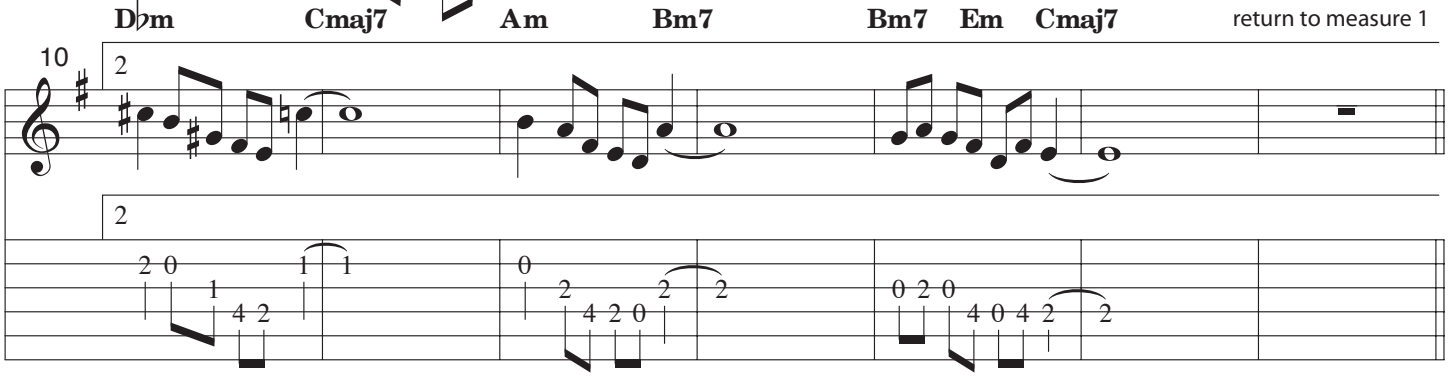
Written by Grant Gordy

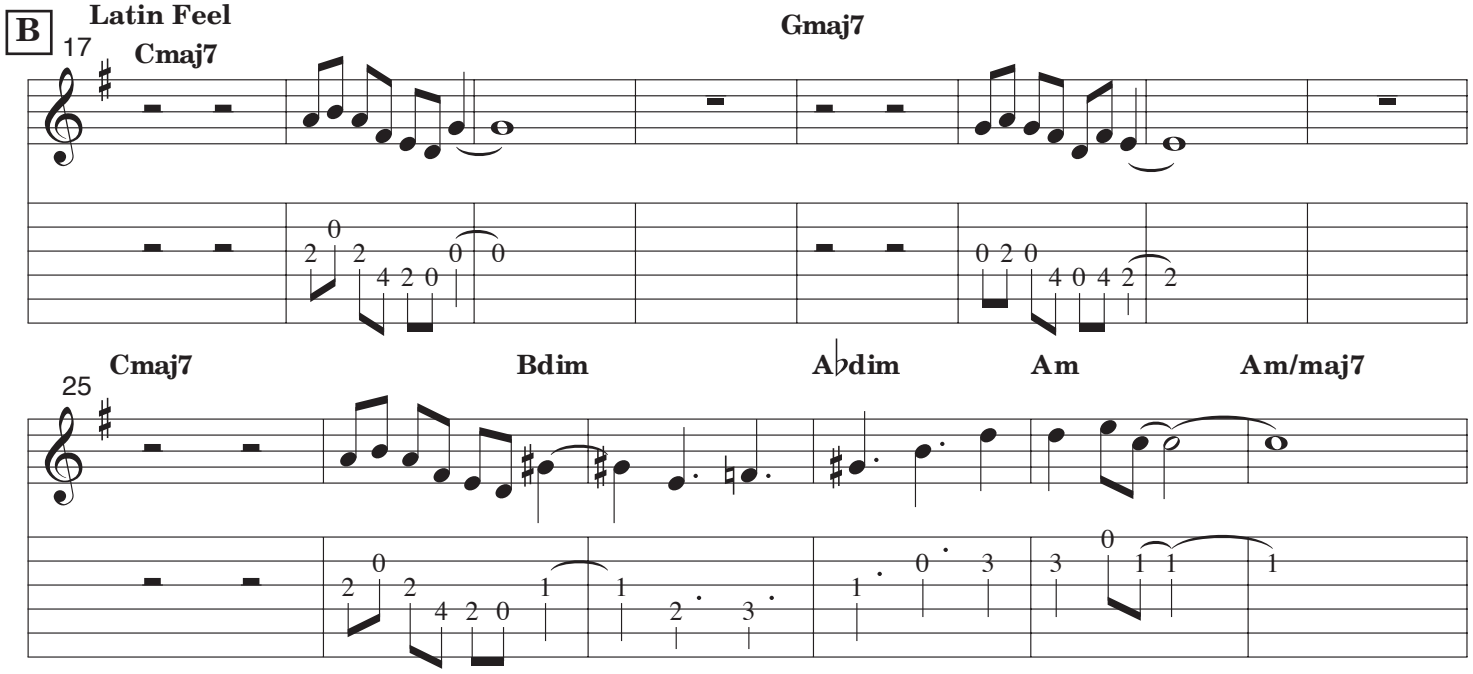
Capo 2

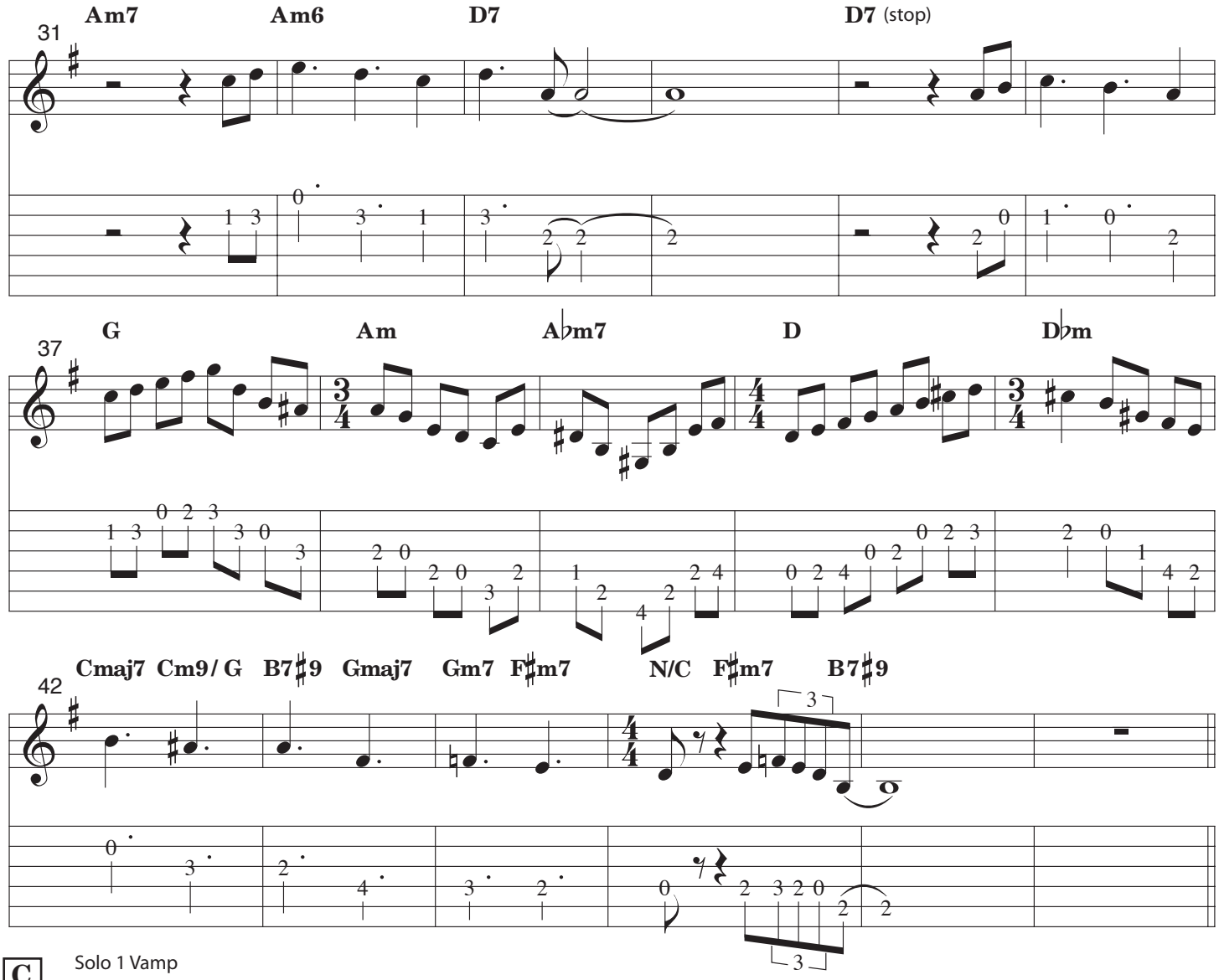
Intro (2X solo mando, 2X w/everyone)









Channel One (con't)

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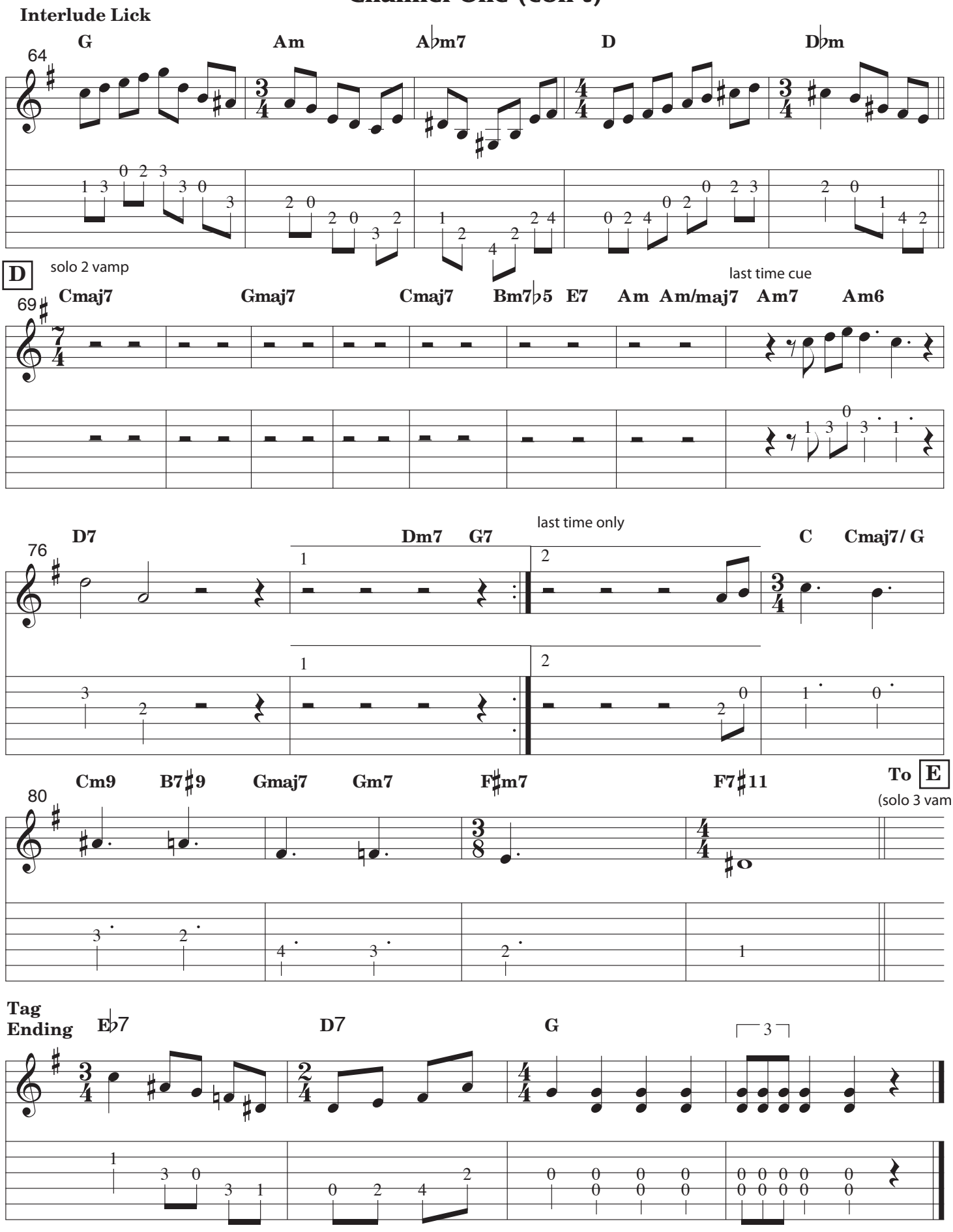
Mt. Ranger Hornpipe

by Craig Vance

From the Irish-American file of old reels and hornpipes, "Mountain Ranger Hornpipe" (also known as "Rose Bud" or "Rose Bud Reel") makes its way to the flatpicking world.

I kept it in its traditional key of Bb. So capo on up to the third fret to play along and play out of the G position.

It's a nice easy tune at an equally easy pace, but a catchy number nonetheless.

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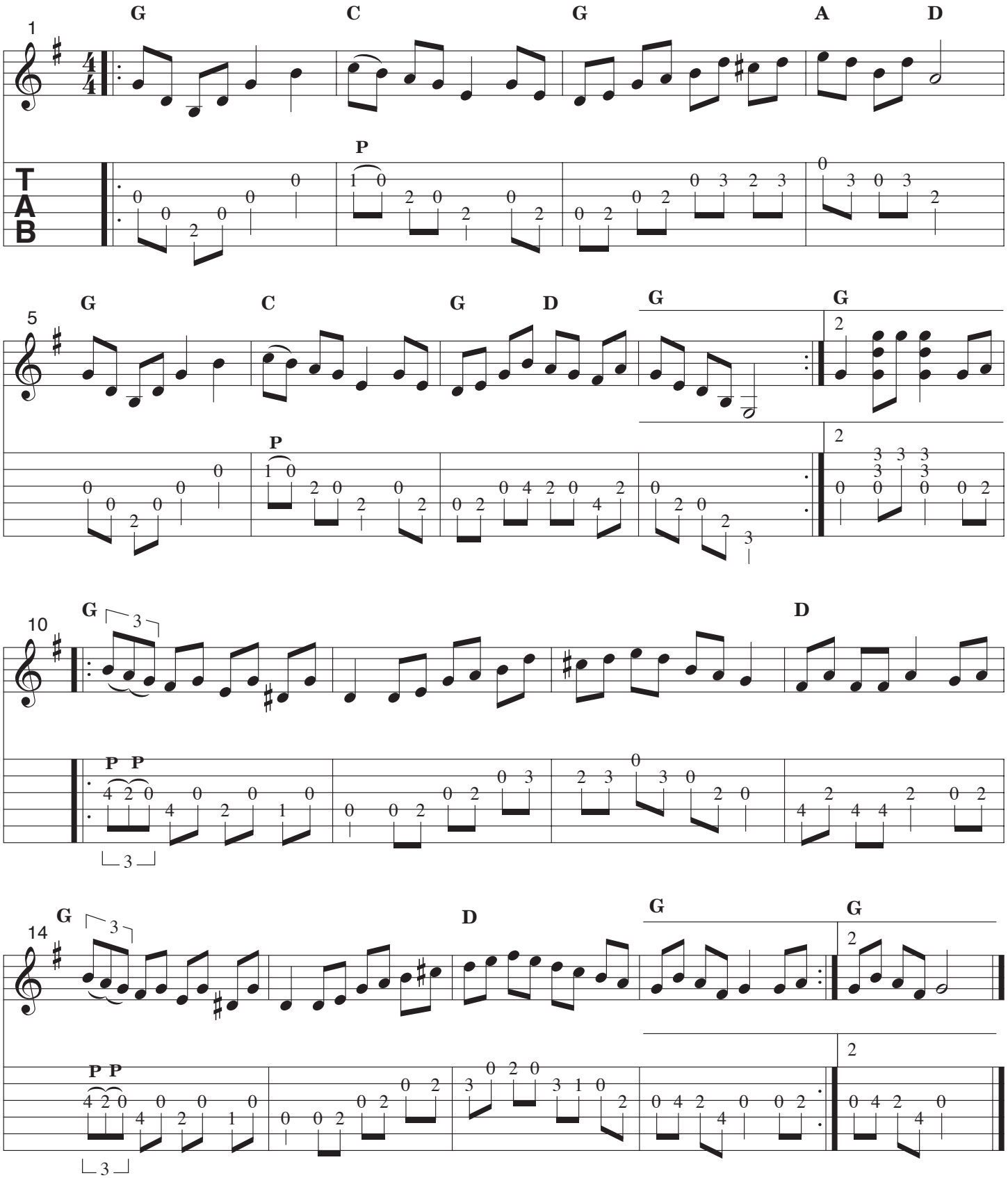
Audio CD
Track 3

Mountain Ranger Hornpipe

Arranged by Craig Vance

Capo 3

Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar

by Joe Carr

The Walls of Time

"The Walls of Time" was a somewhat new bluegrass song when I was getting into the music in the early 1970s. It was written by Bill Monroe and singer/guitarist Peter Rowan during Rowan's tenure as a Bluegrass Boy in the early 1960s. "The Walls of Time" is an almost perfect bluegrass song with its major/minor/modal melody and its eerie dead loved one theme. It only added to the mystique my friends and I had built up around Monroe and his somewhat foreign, but attractive music. Who could resist this lyric?

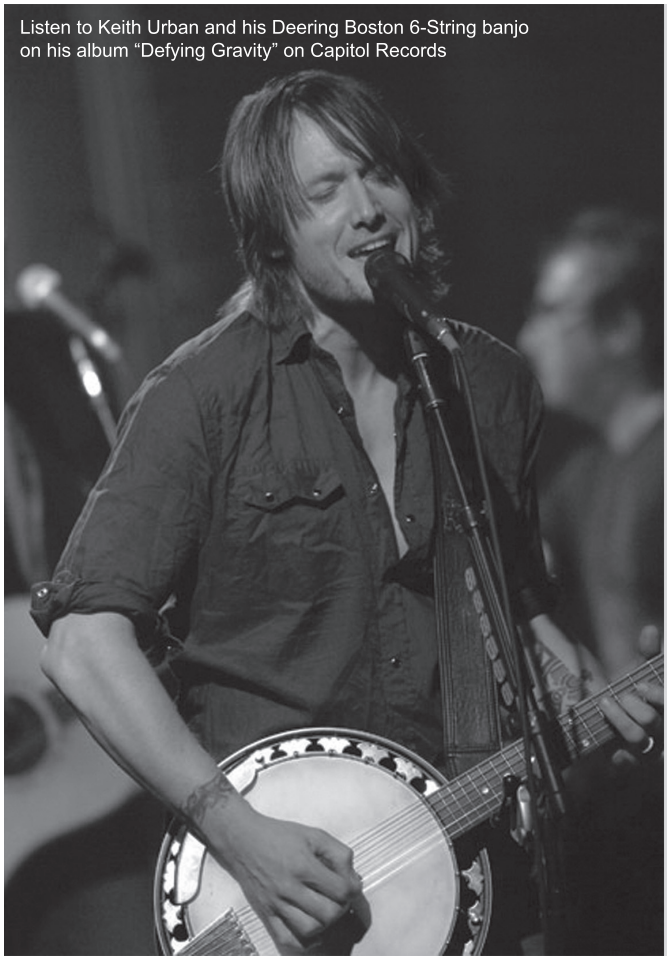
I hear a voice out in the darkness. It moans and whispers through the pines.

I know it's my sweetheart a-calling, I hear her through the walls of time.

Although not released until the early 1990s, an early recording of the song was made in 1965 featuring only Monroe and Rowan during an afternoon workshop performance at the Newport Folk Festival.

Monroe finally recorded the song in the studio in 1968 with Roland White singing lead, although this recording wasn't released until 1994. White remembers, "Lamar [Grier] had a live recording of Peter and Bill singing 'Walls of Time.' I learned it from that concert." While it was apparently written with only two chords, the 1968 studio recording used the E (5) chord at the end of the phrase. Monroe recorded the song again in 1972 with his son James singing lead. The presence of only guitar and mandolin on the 1965 live recording makes this an excellent study of Rowan's rhythm guitar work. White's 1968 recording shows how variations were added to the original.

Rowan plays in the key of B with a capo at the second fret. He plays chords in the key of A. The fact that the rhythm only uses the one and four chords adds to the strange and "lonesome" sound of the duet melody. When White recorded the tune, the Monroe band used three chords putting a five chord in the final phrase. If you typically play in B capoed at the fourth fret, here is a chance to learn some good A and D licks. Use all downstokes on the bass runs for an authentic sound. Thanks to Gerald Jones for his playing on the CD.



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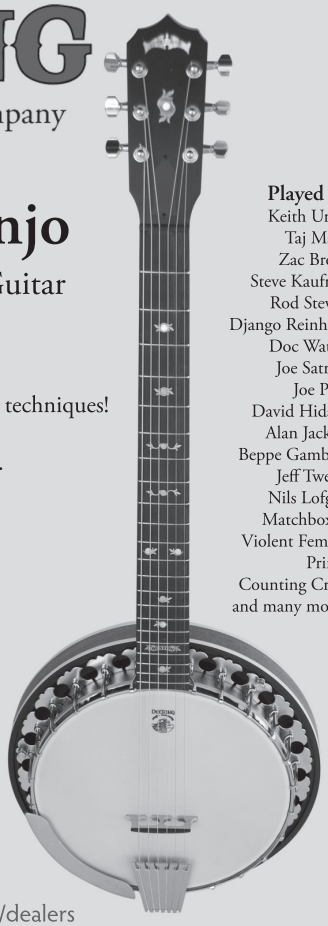
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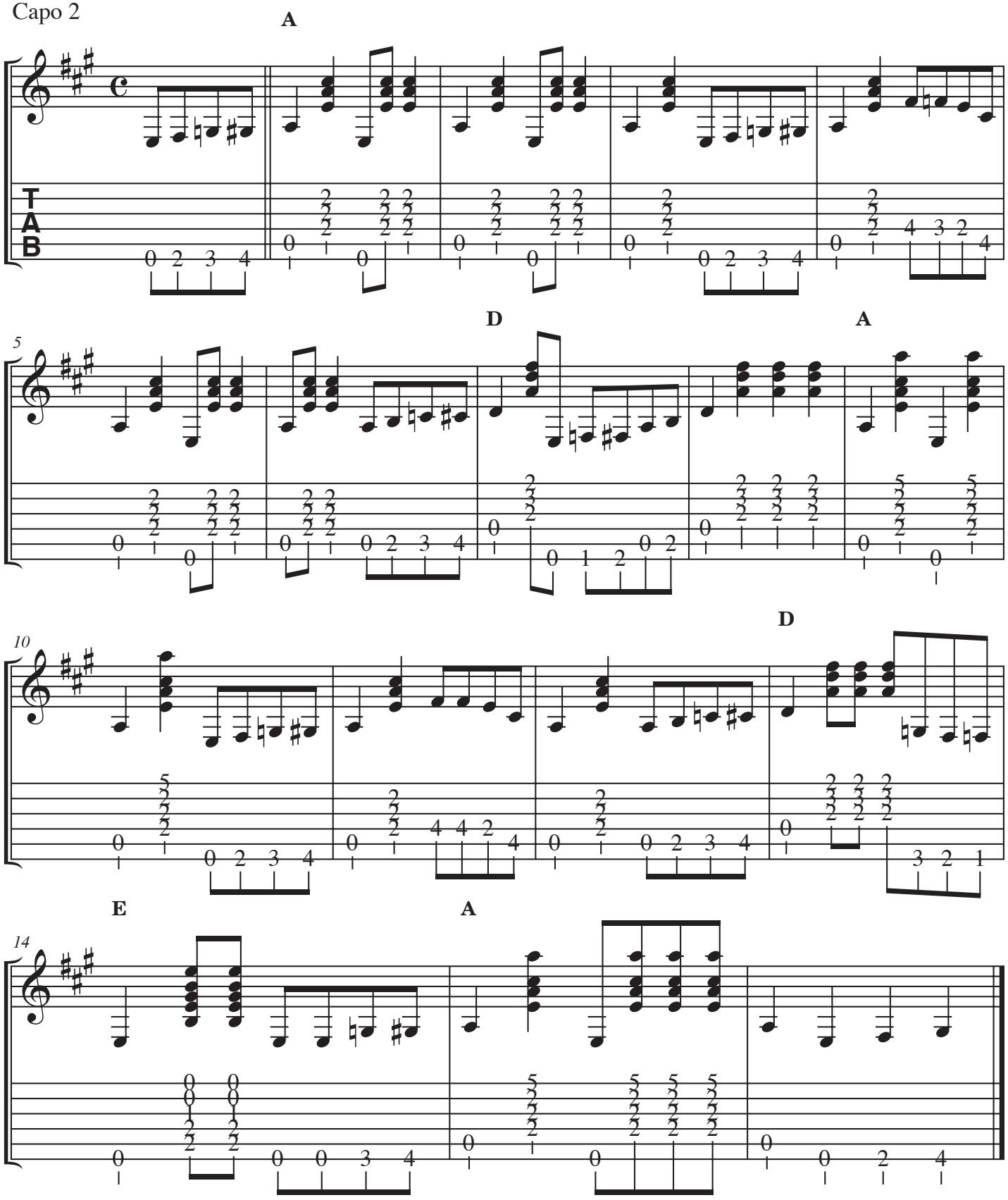
Django Reinhardt
Doc Watson
Joe Satriani
Joe Perry
David Hidalgo
Alan Jackson
Beppe Gambetta
Jeff Tweedy
Nils Lofgren
Matchbox 20
Violent Femmes
Primus
Counting Crows
and many more...

Audio CD
Track 4

Walls of Time — Rhythm

Transcribed by Joe Carr

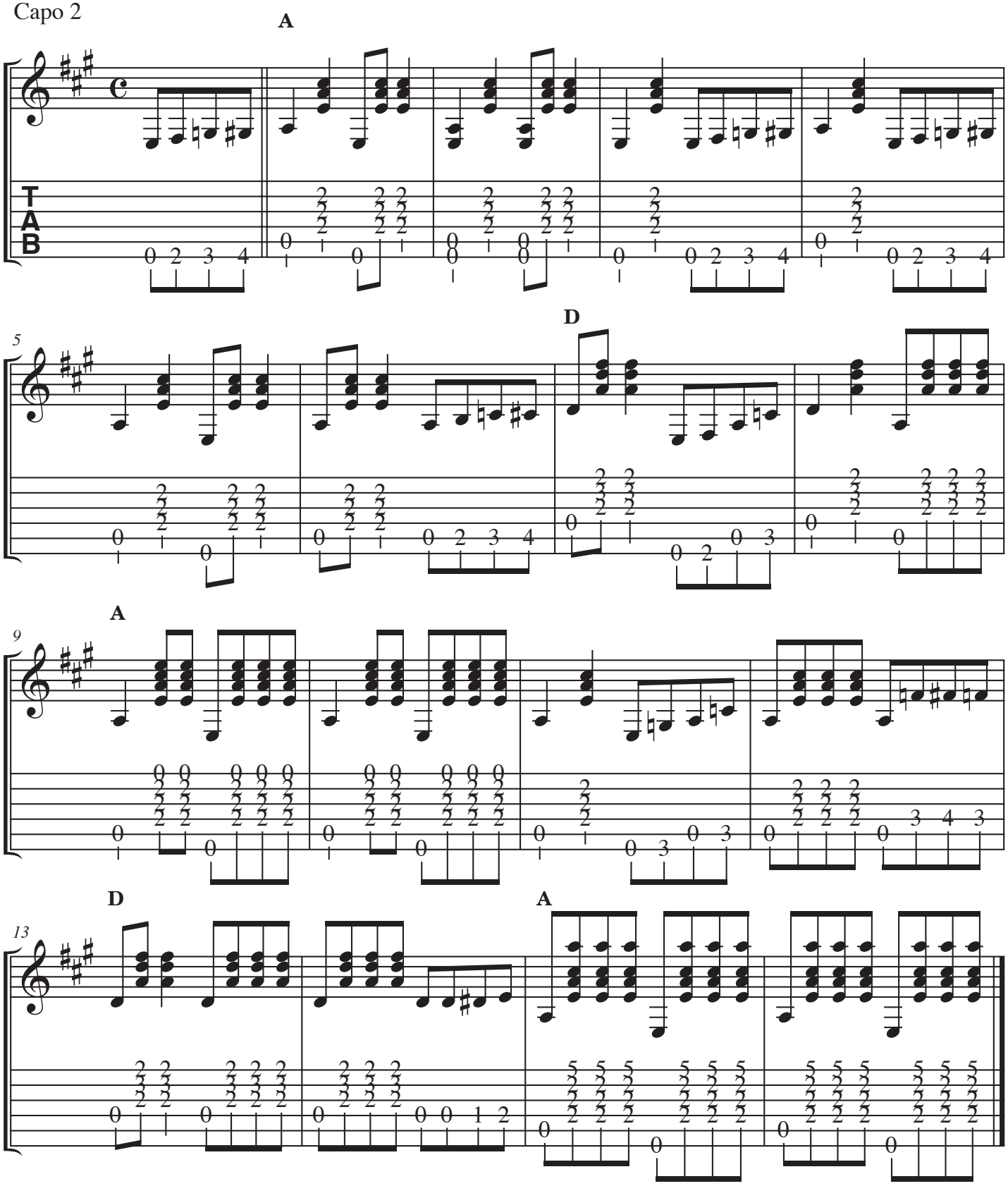
Roland White Style

Capo 2

Audio CD
Track 5

Walls of Time — Rhythm

Transcribed by Joe Carr

Peter Rowan Style

Capo 2

Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

I'll Never Shed Another Tear

It was about 50 years ago that Lester Flatt said to Earl Scruggs and Paul Warren, "Boys, I wrote a new song and I'm calling it 'I'll Never Shed Another Tear.'" Immediately Earl and Paul both thought, "Oh no, now I gotta come up with a break for it."

So they both started searching around on their instruments for the notes that Lester was singing. They both intended to honor Lester's melody as accurately as they could. After they became comfortable with the "fingerboard location," they started playing around with ideas to decorate the melody with some of the standard kick-offs, fills, turnarounds and hot-licks that were standard for their respective instruments and personal styles of playing. Before long, each settled on a final version, so they told Lester that they were ready to schedule the studio to record a CPS (Cotton-Pickin-Smash).

Fast-forward one generation: the Bluegrass Album Band went to the studio to record a tribute to Lester's song, so J. D. Crowe and Bobby Hicks were faced with the same problem. Each thought to himself, "I'd do those Foggy Mountain Boys proud to play my break note-for-note, so I'll play it mostly like the original, but I'll include a pinch of my personality too."

Now let's fast-forward to yet a third generation, to the current issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*. How am I going to come up with a guitar version? Well, the guitar is similar to the fiddle, in that they are both linear instruments. The guitar is somewhat like the banjo, because the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th strings are tuned the same as the banjo. So, just as Earl and Paul honored Lester's melody, and J. D. and Bobby honored Earl and Paul's breaks...

The first thing I did was to search for the melody on my guitar. In doing so, I discovered certain elements of the melody that were uniquely different from other songs. (It was at this point that I realized that the melody was going to prevent my solo from sounding like all my other solos). The second thing i did was to copy a fiddle lick from Paul/Bobby and a banjo lick from Earl/J. D. Then the last thing I did was to start trying to decorate it with some of the standard kick-offs, fills, turnarounds, and hot icks that are standard to my personal guitar style. In other words, I followed the same process as two generations of my predecessors.

In fact, this is the process that my music instruction company has used for the past 38 years. So I hope you enjoy learning this break, but I also hope that you will be encouraged to apply this time-weathered formula, because working up a break is the essence of being a flatpicking guitar player.

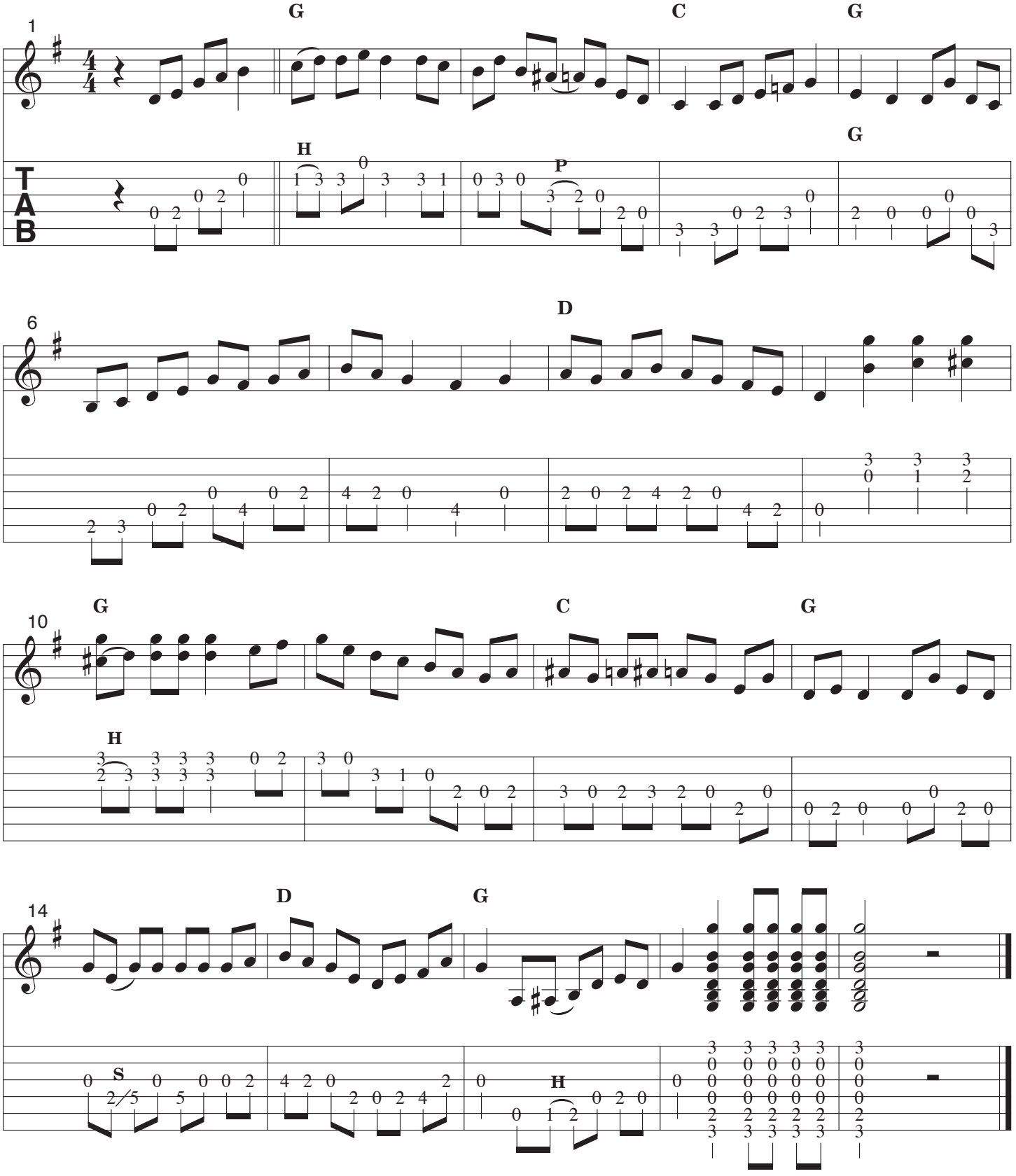
If you have any questions, you are welcome to call me toll free at 800-543-6125. My company, Musicians-Workshop.com has an ad in the back of this issue, so check it out, and let me know if you have a special request for next issue.

Note: If any of the above story is true, take it as evidence of my clairvoyance.

Audio CD
Tracks 7-8

I'll Never Shed Another Tear

Arranged by Dan Huckabee

Capo 4

Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

Lonesome Fiddle Blues

Hi frends and welcome back to my corner of the magazine. This month I was caught out on the road right after Kamp and couldn't get to record anything so Dan suggested I use a cut from one of my CDs. I chose "Lonesome Fiddle Blues" from my latest CD, *Goodnight Waltz*, with guitar great Mark Cosgrove. This tune apparently was written by Vasser Clement's wife Millie around the time of the original *Circle* album. This was a huge time in my learning period. I used to take fiddle records (yes, records – made of vinyl) and when you slowed fiddle down from 33 1/3 down to 16rpm it would drop it a perfect octave and right in the range best suited for flatpicking guitar. Yes! So I learned a lot of Vassar, Kenny Baker, Benny Thomason, Howdy Forester, Herman Johnson and any great fiddlers I could steal, um, learn from.

I've written out my introduction and my first solo. When working out the intro, try to maximize your sustain when playing the double stops. Use the fingerings marked and it will be easier.

Next Mark takes a solo and then the plot thickens. My first solo has a characteristic Vassar run and part of the original melody. Very simple but melodic in measures 13-16. This can also end on an Am. Check it out.

Measures 19-20 have some tricky right hand maneuvers. Watch out for the arrow markings and follow them slowly and steadily.

Measures 25-26 have a really neat E run that leads to an A. Try to use it in songs like "Cincinnati Rag" or any other tune with an E-to-A situation.

To conserve space I will click off here. If you want to find the rest of this powerhouse CD *Goodnight Waltz*, you can order it from my new site at www.flatpik.com or find it at many of the download sites.

Enjoy and see you down the road somewhere.
Bye for now,
Steve Kaufman
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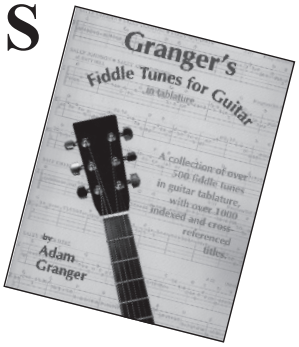
GRANGER'S FIDDLE TUNES for GUITAR



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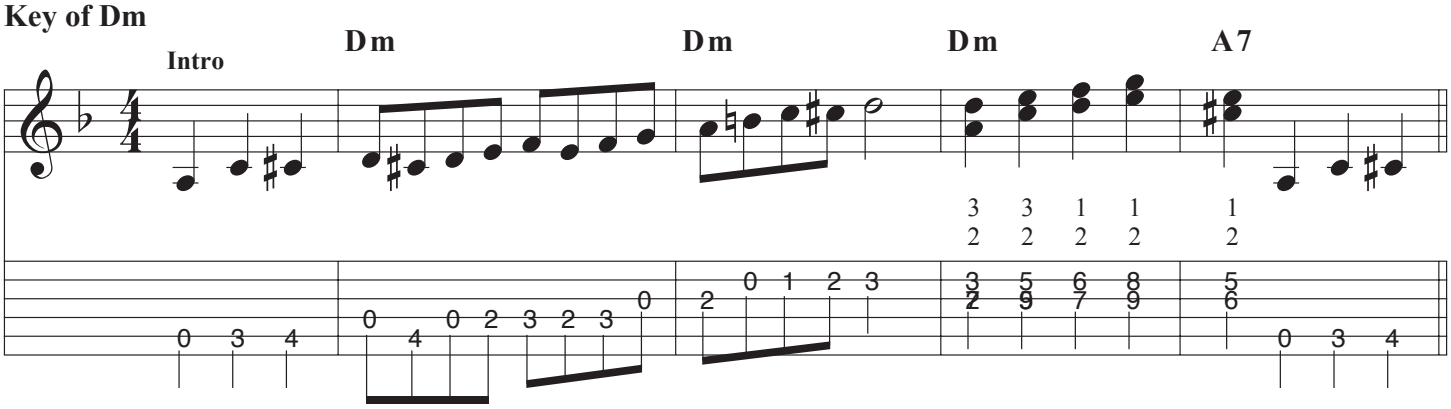
Audio CD
Track 9

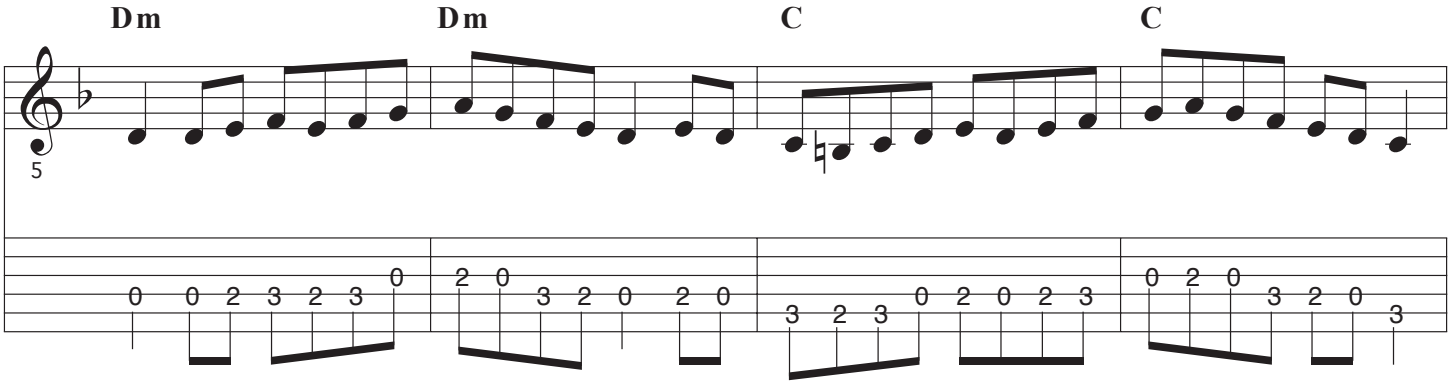
Lonesome Fiddle Blues

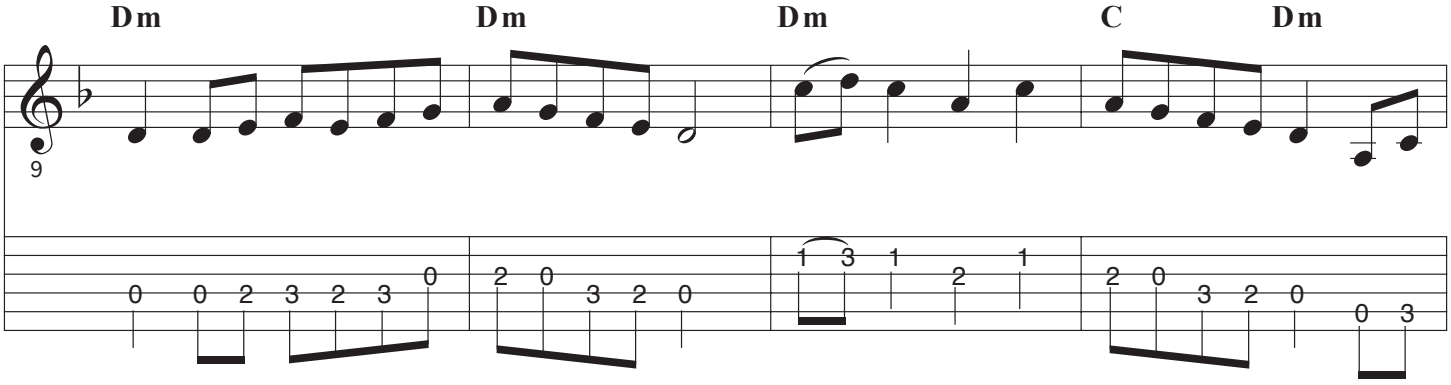
Arranged by Steve Kaufman

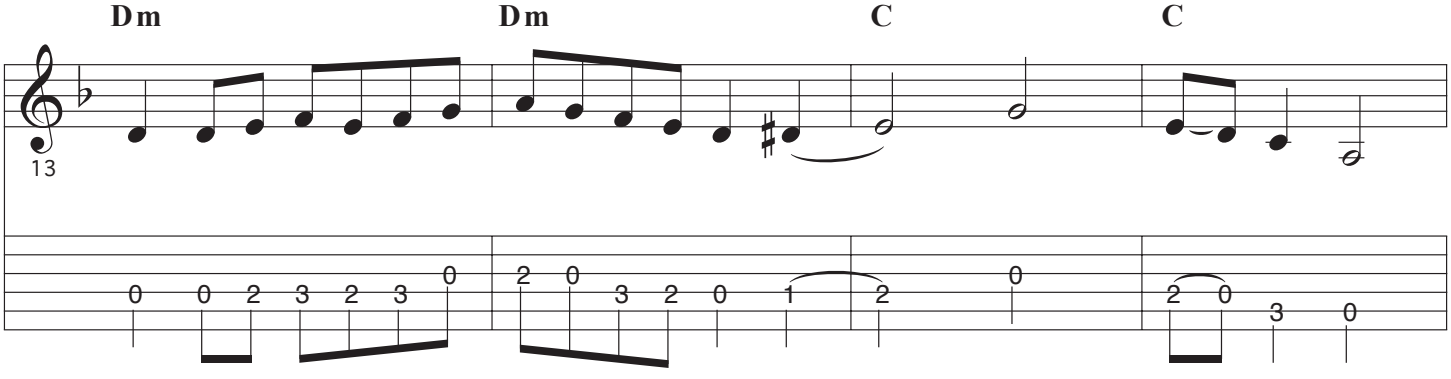
Key of Dm

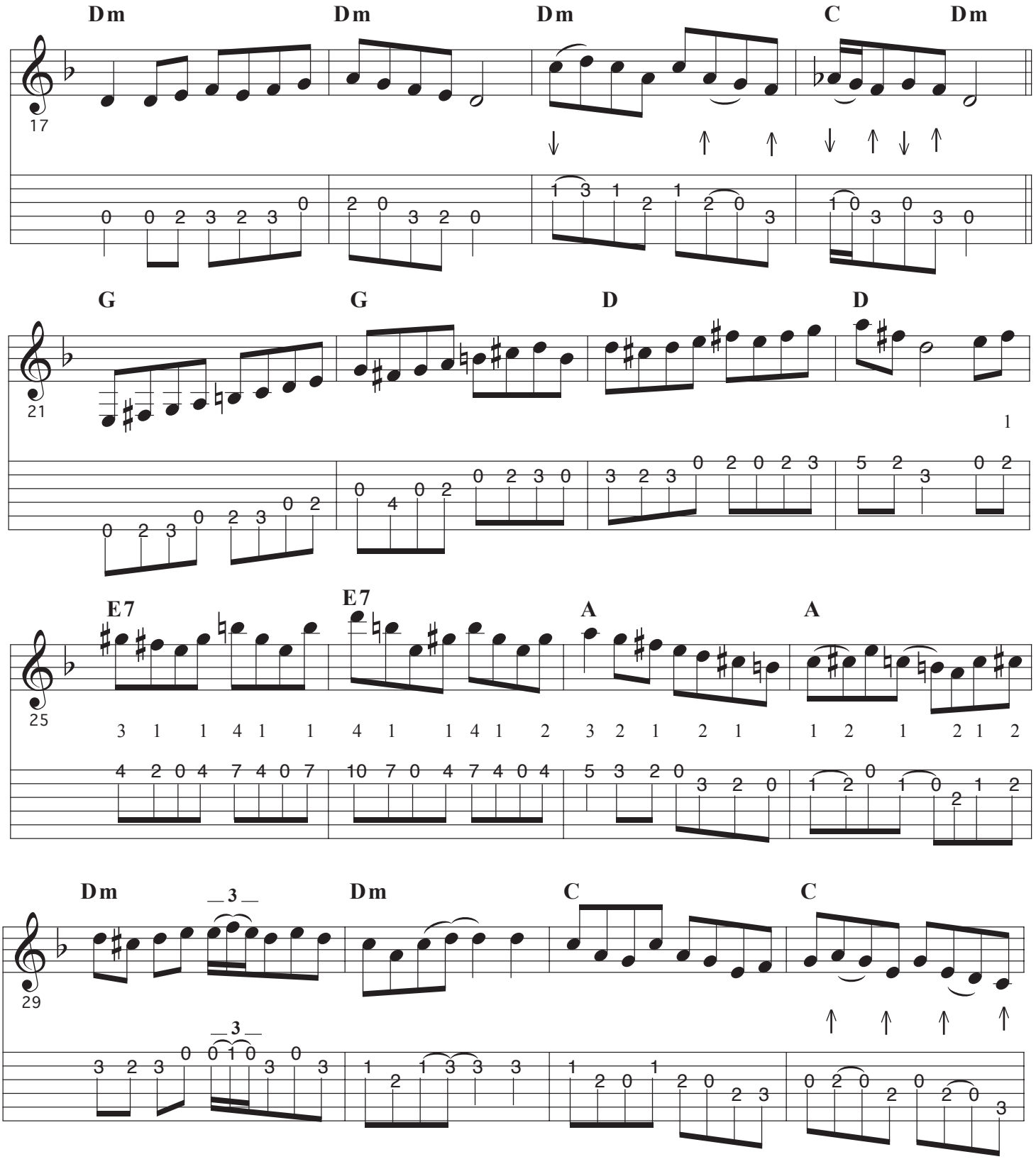


Mark takes the first solo then Steve.....







Lonesome Fiddle Blues (con't)

Taking It To The Next Level: Your Personal G Major Lab

by John Carlini

"Inspiration to a contemporary composer is nothing more than working with his materials until the pieces fit properly. Natural talent to John Coltrane is long and tedious hours of practice and a great insight and understanding of the materials of music. These materials are Musical Form and Construction, Chords, Combination Chords and their Variants, the use of Modal Melodic Approaches, and the ability to improvise with split second timing with ease and confidence."

— Oliver Nelson

That's heady stuff, right? Oliver Nelson was a brilliant musician, jazz sax player, and arranger with major movie scores on his resumé. His recording, *Blues and the Abstract Truth* is in every jazz musician's library. I find it inspirational to hear what people like him have to say about...well... about anything!

The amount of potential info that can be garnered from a major scale is astounding!

Take a look at the first illustration on the next page, the G Major scale notated on the first 12 frets of the guitar fingerboard. Follow along with the audio as you investigate the various modes and chords generated by that scale.

After you are finished with the audio, I recommend that you spend some time with that opening full fingerboard chart and do some experimenting in your personal G Major Lab.

For instance, find some alternate mode fingerings. Just grab a root with any finger in any position and work your way up and down the mode.

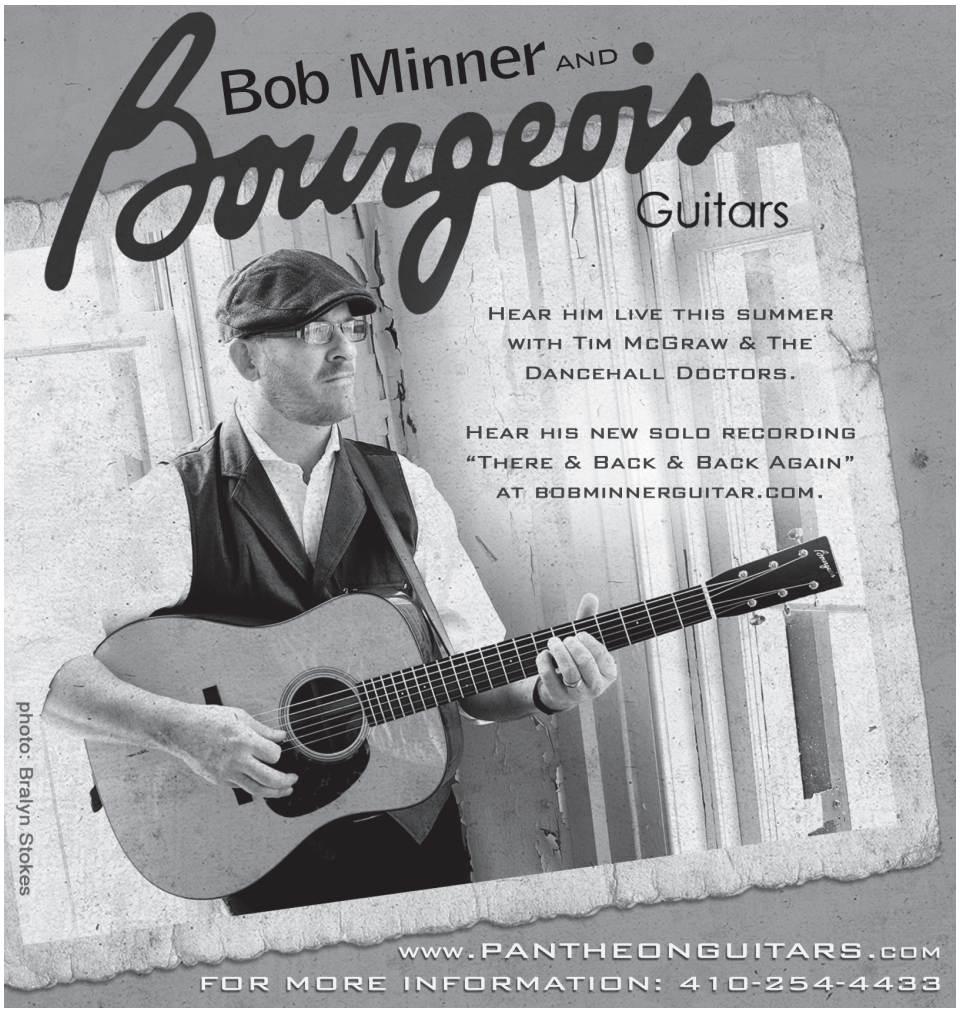
Working with chords can be extremely instructive and eye opening. In finding new chord forms, here is something to consider: Thirds and sevenths, be they major or minor, are what give a chord its character. They are the most important tones to include. Fifths are generally expendable. Let's say that you are searching for some alternate Dmin7 chords. You definitely want to include F (b3) and C (b7). A (5) completes the chord, but it is not essential. It's probably best to include a root, D, so that you can hear the basis of the chord. Fortunately, the guitar has on open D! Take advantage of it because that gives you a lot more freedom to find other Dmin7 sounds as you explore the fingerboard.

I did not mention this on the audio, but don't forget arpeggios! There is a world of arpeggios built in to the major scale. Refer to the chord tones shown next to the chord names, such as Emin7 (E-G-B-D). Find and play those four notes ascending and descending anywhere and everywhere on the fingerboard for as many octaves as you choose.

This is your lab! Jump in and discover some secrets! You'll know it pays off when you are jamming sometime and someone says, "Hey man! Where'd you get that Emin chord from?!"

By the way, mandolin and banjo players: you can make similar charts for your instruments!

Visit www.johncarlini.com for teaching and performing info, music news items, and a cool photo gallery! Several types of fingerboard templates will be available for download on the site very soon. I have been using these templates in my own work for many years and now you can as well.

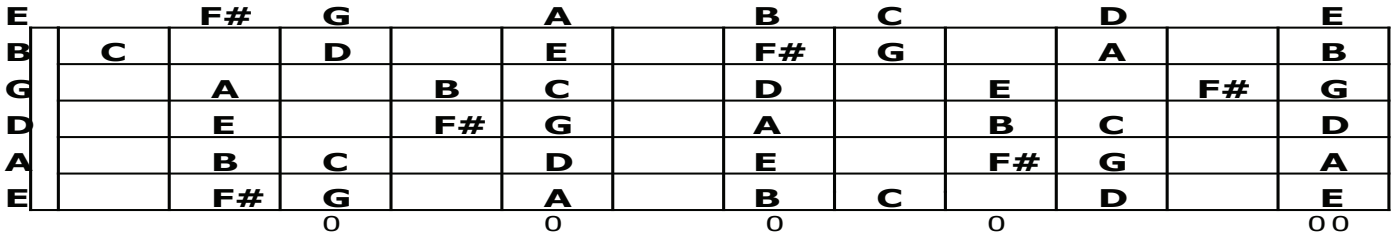


Audio CD
Track 10

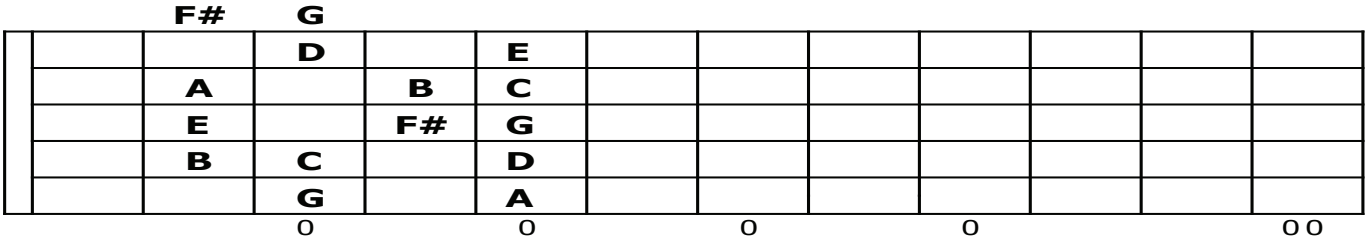
The G Major Lab

Arranged by John Carlini

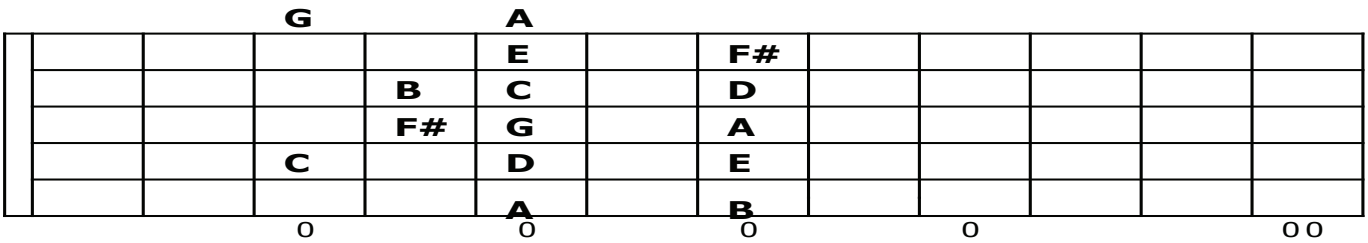
G Major Scale – Whole Fingerboard



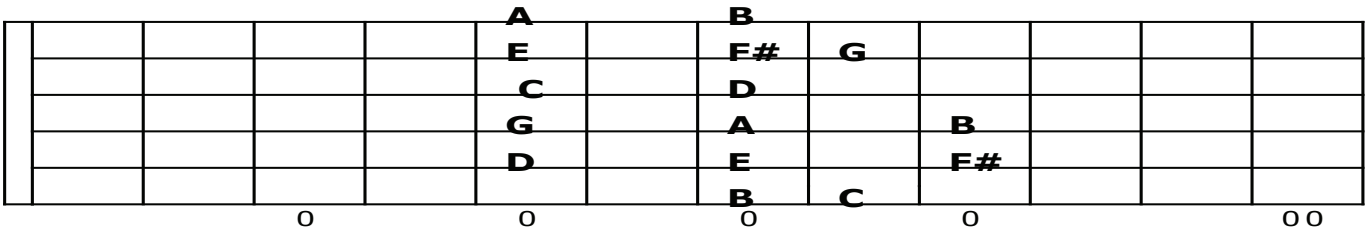
G Ionian



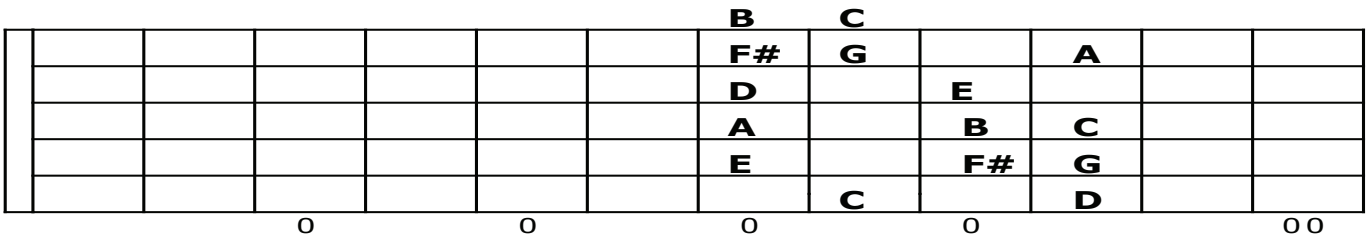
A Dorian



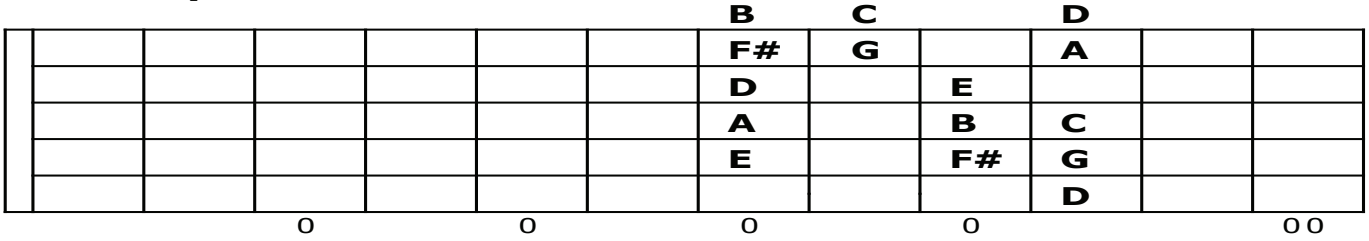
B Phrygian



C Lydian

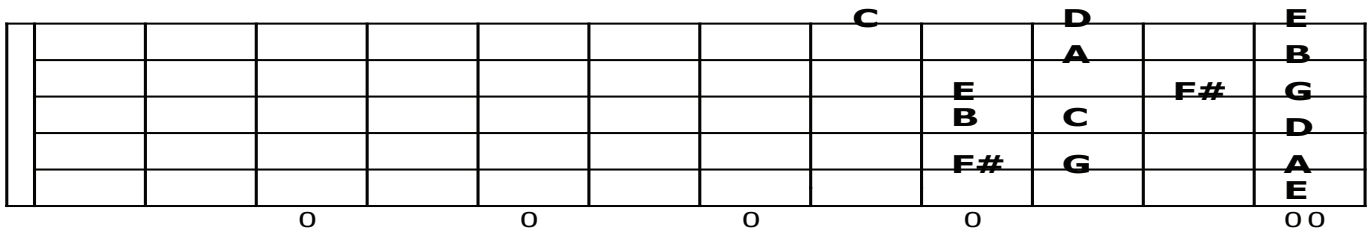


D Mixolydian

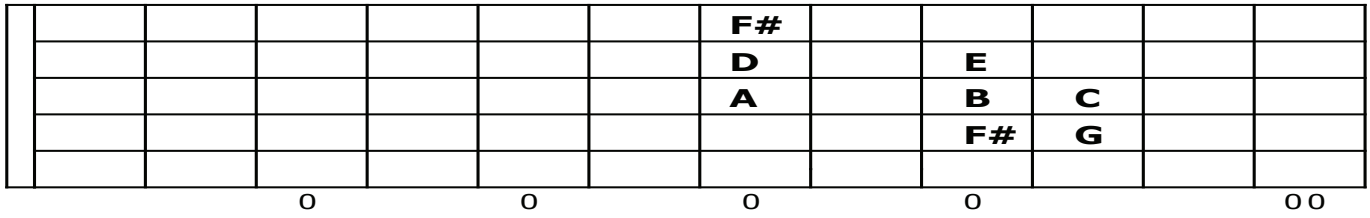


The G Major Lab (con't)

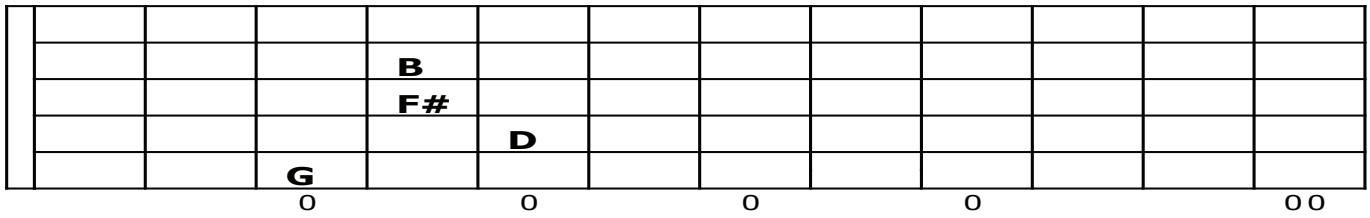
E Aeolian



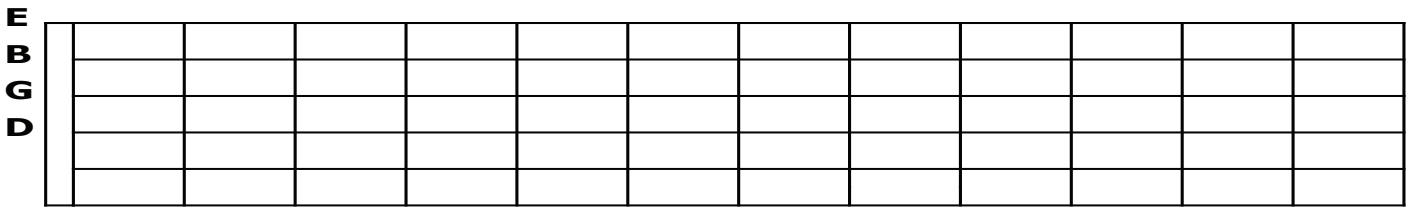
F# Locrian



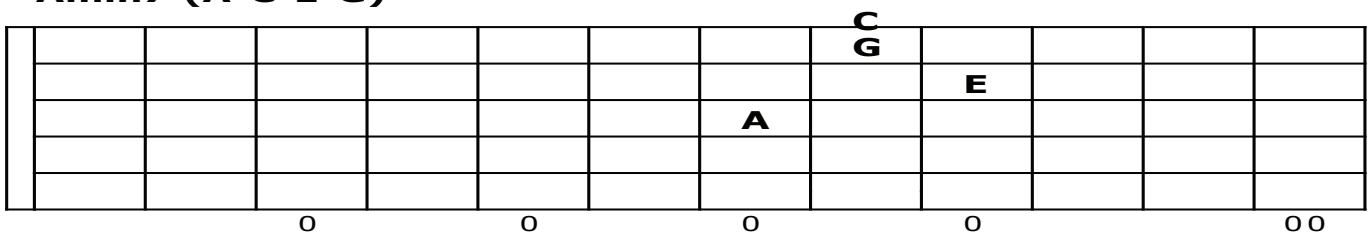
GMaj7 (G–B–D–F#)



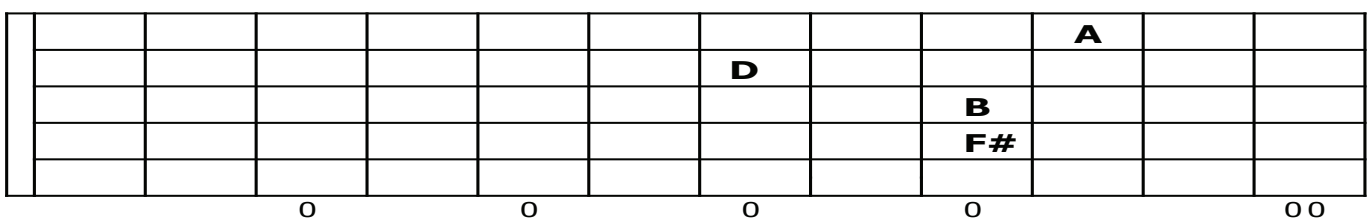
G6 (G–B–D–E)



Amin7 (A–C–E–G)

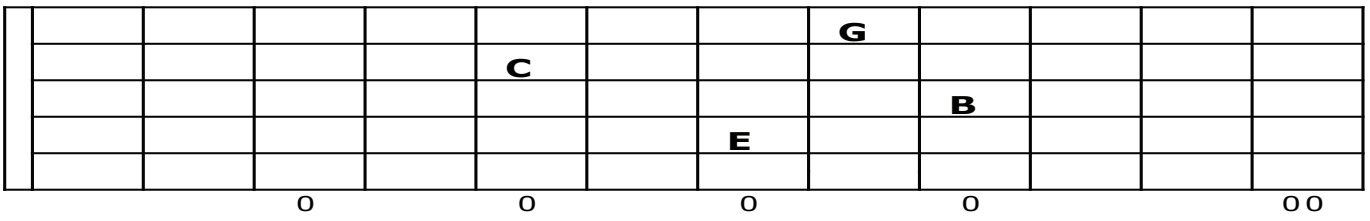


Bmin7 (B–D–F#–A)

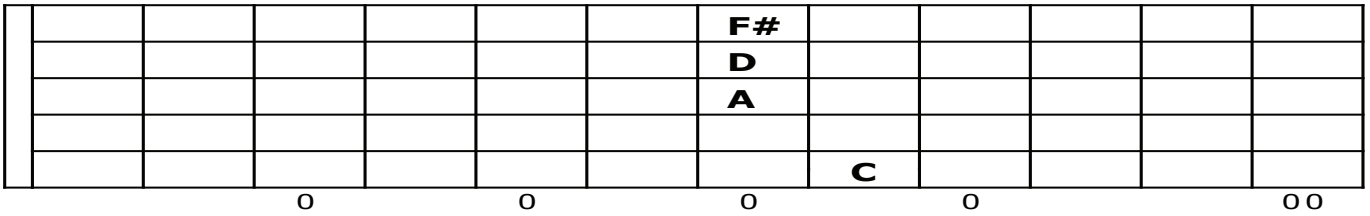


The G Major Lab (con't)

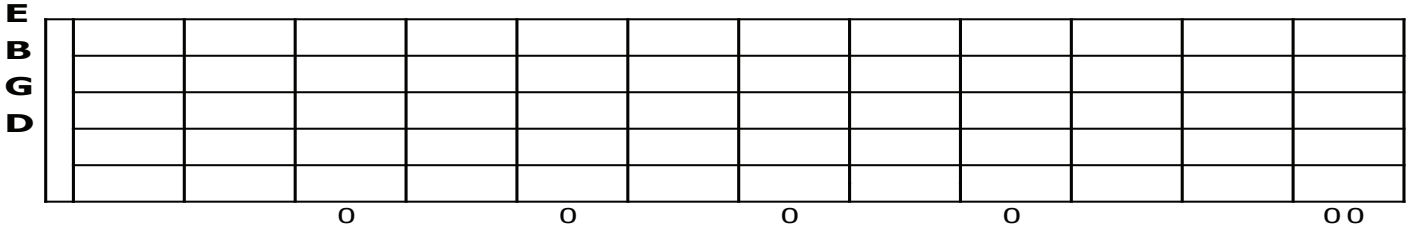
CMaj7 (C–E–G–B)



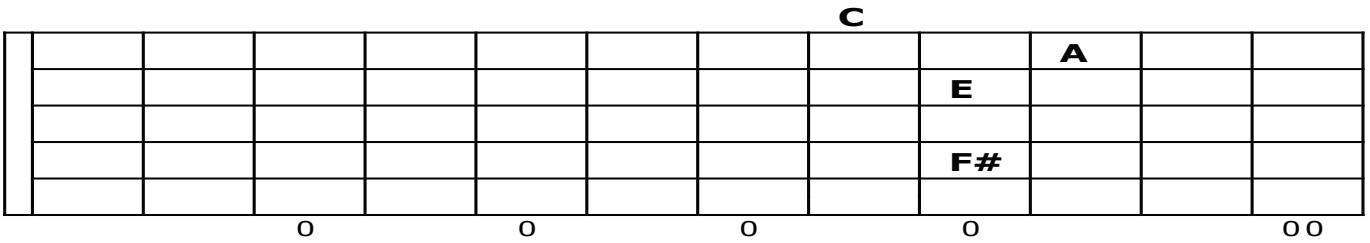
D7 (D–F#–A–C)



Emin7 (E–G–B–D) *Also is G6!



F#min7(b5) (F#–A–C–E)



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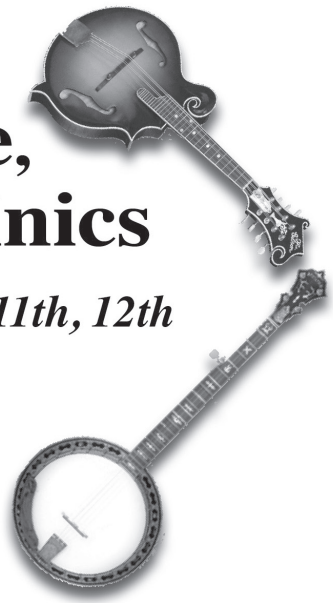

NASHVILLE FLATTOP

By Brad Davis

Rhythm and Timing Practice

Before I play any show, or record in the studio, I like to spend some time warming up. For me, warming up the right hand and getting my head in sync with a timing device really helps my performance in the show and/or session go smoothly. In this issue I'd like to give you an example of one of the warm up routines that I use.

This routine combines the Rhythm Pick Pattern (RPP) that I've talked about in previous columns with a four note repeated pattern on one string. What I like to do when playing these repeated string patterns is alternate the use of rest strokes and floating strokes (or swing strokes). In other words, you are going to play the RPP crosspicking pattern, then you are going to play four notes in a row on one string. The first time you play those four strings you are going to use a rest stroke on the down beats (in measure one for example). The next time you play the four single notes on one string, use your swing strokes (measure 2 for example).

When most flatpickers play four eighth notes in a row, they will always use the swing stroke for both the down strokes and the up strokes. They will typically reserve the rest stroke technique for down stroke quarter notes. However, since I utilize the rest stroke when I play the eighth note double-down-up technique, I like to get in as much rest stroke practice as I can.

If you are unfamiliar with the rest stroke, let me define it for you. When you execute a rest stroke the pick pushes through the string and comes to rest on the string below it. The angle of attach is actually down towards the guitar's top. When you execute a swing stroke you are swinging free of the adjacent string. Try this exercise using both rest strokes and swing strokes on those four repeated single string notes and see if that helps your right hand accuracy and timing.

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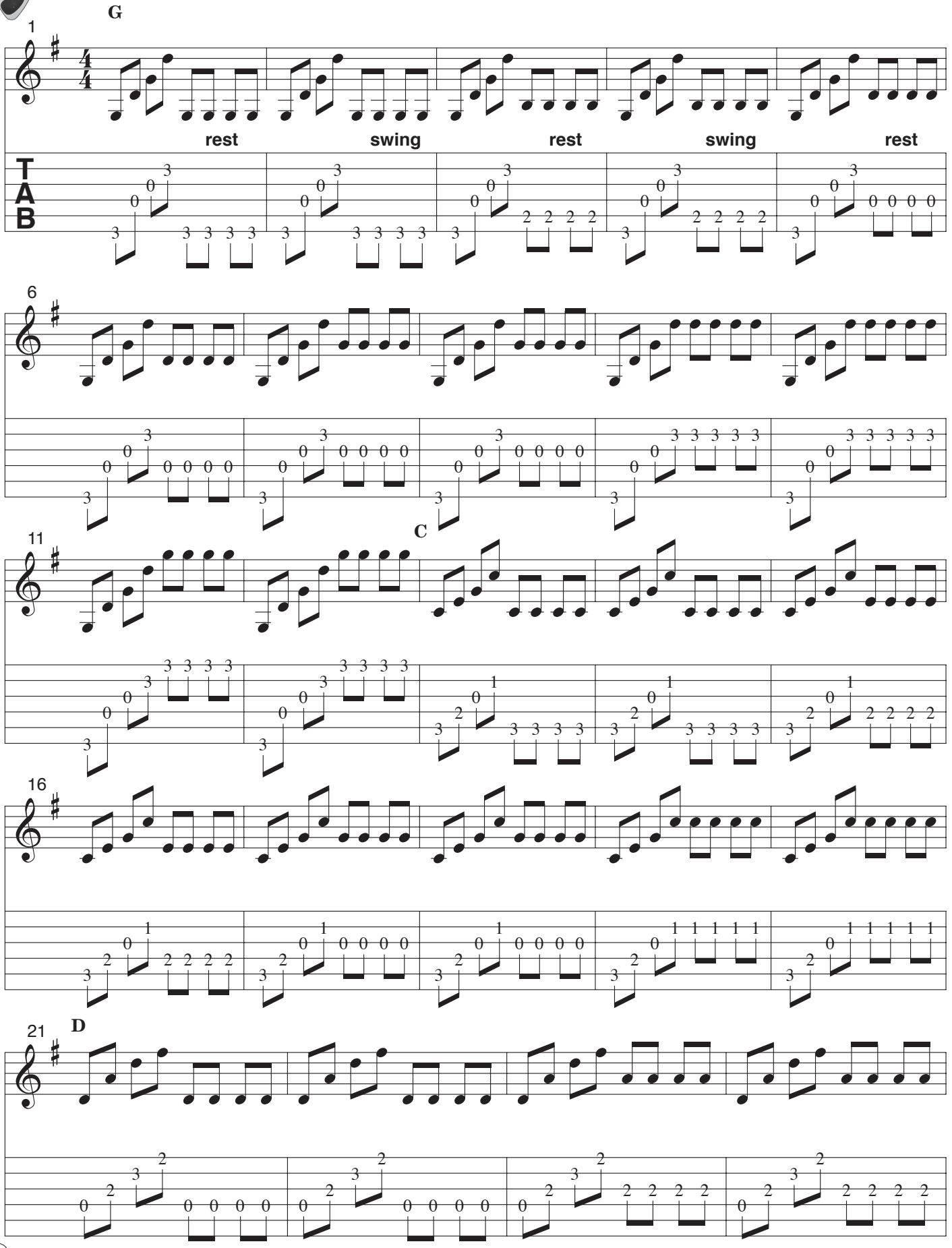
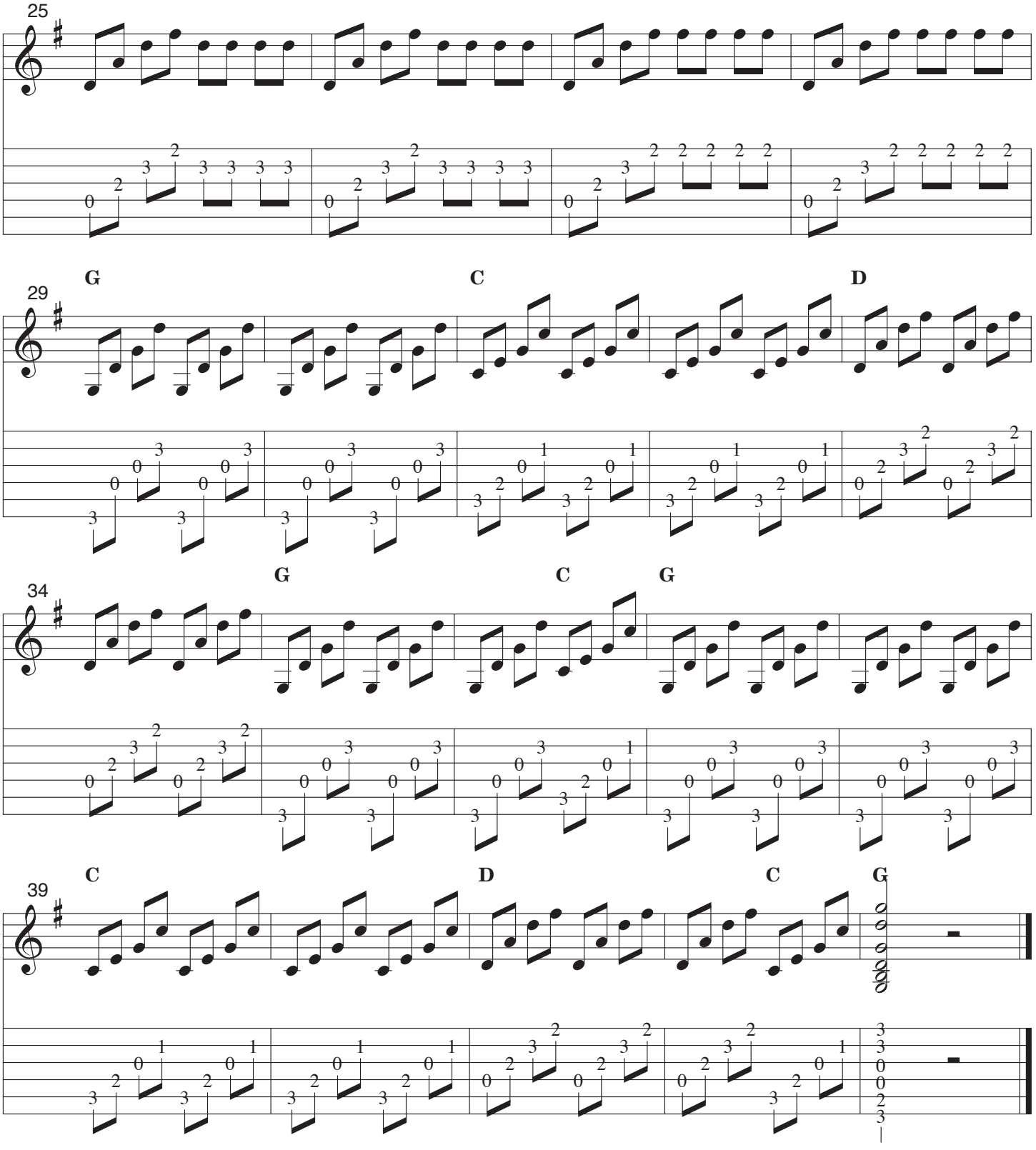
Audio CD
Track 11

Rhythm and Timing Exercise

Arranged by Brad Davis

Rhythm and Timing Exercise (con't)

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Sharpening the Axe
by Jeff Troxel

The Leaving of Liverpool

Continuing with my theme of solo flatpicking, I've decided to present my arrangement of an old folk ballad, "The Leaving of Liverpool." I first stumbled onto this song in a Hal Leonard guitar book while searching for a solo piece for a student. I was instantly taken with the melody. Later I found some lyrics and started performing it in concert. I recorded a version of it on my new CD with Trevor Krieger, *Spirit of our Time*.

This arrangement lies easily on the guitar in C position, and the capo at the 4th fret makes the notes ring bright and clear. I chose to capo four to accommodate my singing voice, but you can move it wherever it suits you.

This arrangement is a study in crosspicking. The notes are meant to ring together as chord tones whenever possible and I included a fingering in measure 3 to help accommodate the F chord. I'm using standard up/down picking throughout, but there is opportunity for many other choices.

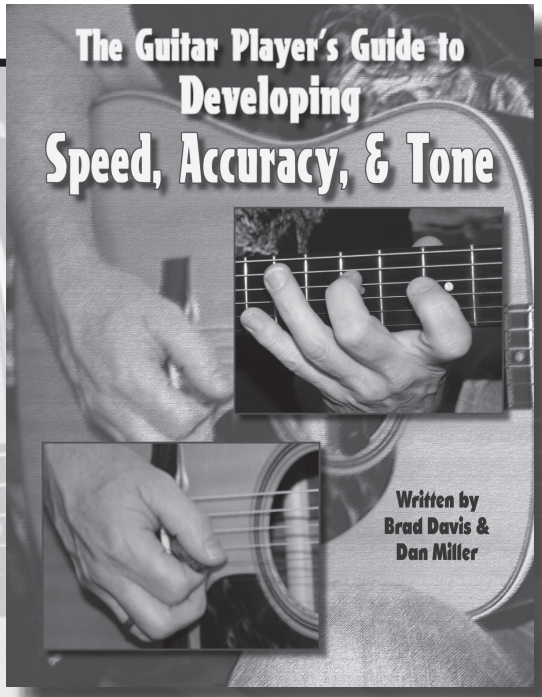
The only time this arrangement leaves 1st position is in measure 18. This creates a common fingering for the C note to briefly "clash" with the open B. Then the C is quickly played again on the second string. Experiment with the timbral effects this can create and see if you can find places to use this idea in other songs.

Some of you out there have made recordings of my arrangements and sent them to me to hear. I want to encourage that. Not only is it a lot of fun for me to hear other renditions of my arrangements; it's also very good for you. Recording yourself is an excellent way to step back and critique yourself without the distraction of playing. You'll hear things that you wouldn't notice while executing the song and it's a great way to improve many aspects of your musicianship.

I hope you enjoy playing "The Leaving of Liverpool." As always, feel free to email me with any questions that arise. Good luck, and I'll catch you next time.

The Guitar Player's Guide to Developing
Speed, Accuracy, & Tone

by Brad Davis & Dan Miller



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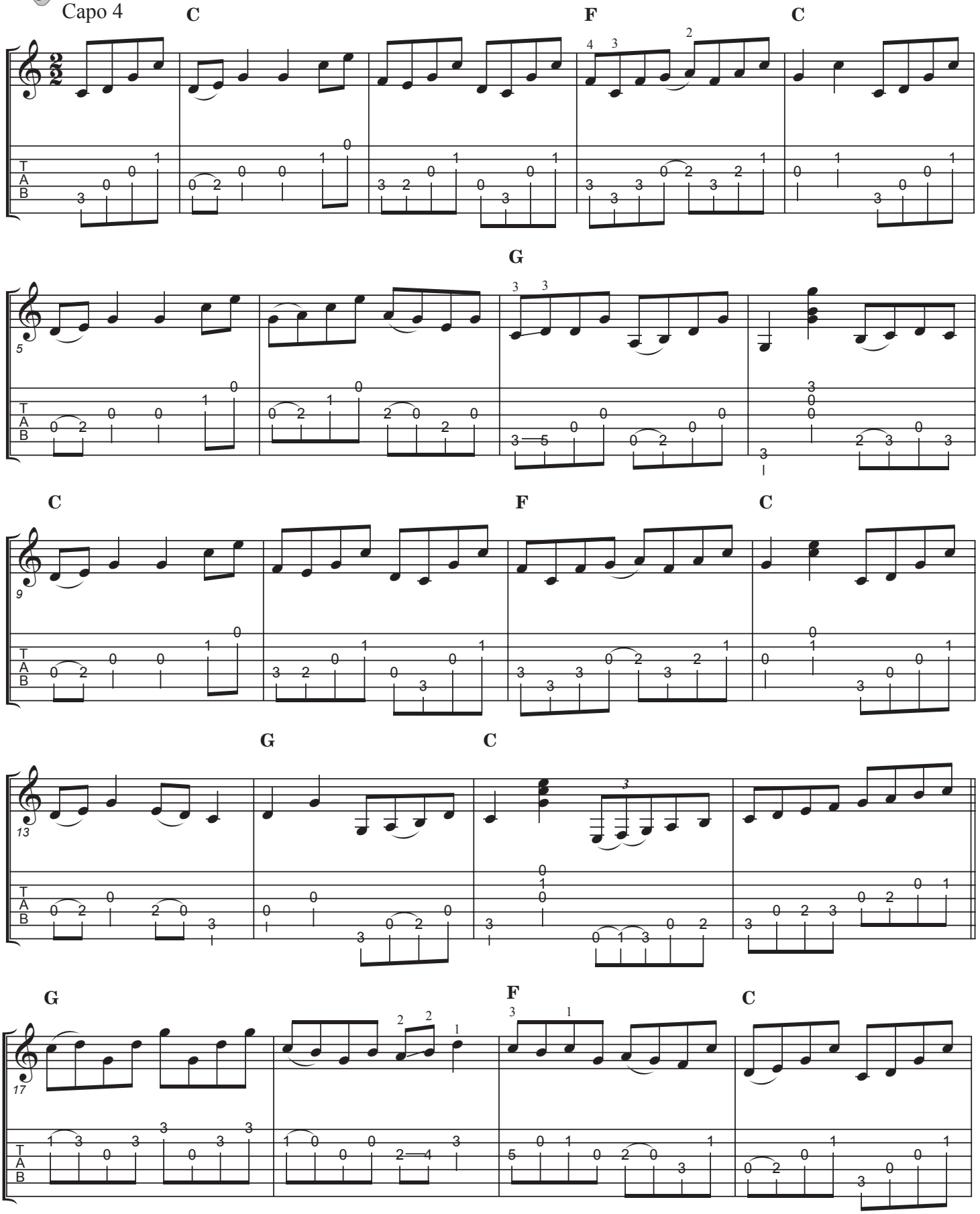
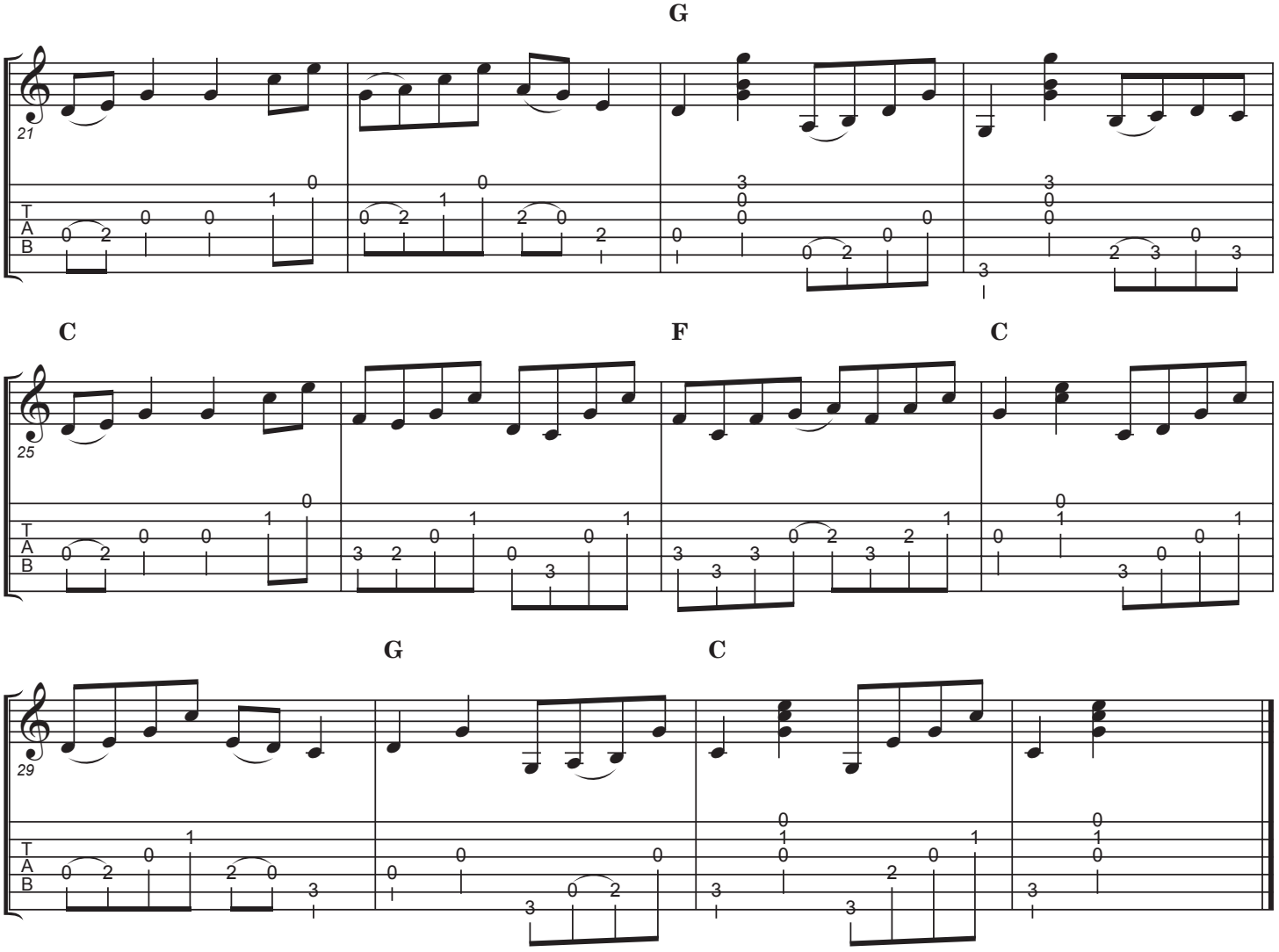
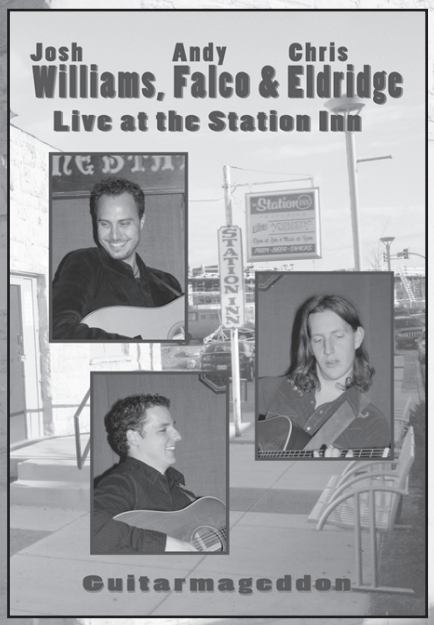
The Leaving of Liverpool

Audio CD
Track 12

Arranged by Jeff Troxel

Capo 4

The Leaving of Liverpool (con't)



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Bluegrass Harmonic Minor

by Tim May

Bluegrass Harmonic Minor

There are many things that can get you thrown out of a bluegrass festival. If someone mentions "Earl" and you say, "Earl who?" you will be asked to leave. And you certainly will be escorted out if you play a fully diminished arpeggio or harmonic minor scale. But we can take scales that sound too "far out" to our purist or semi-purist ears and alter them for our purposes: I want to do that here with the harmonic minor scale and call this scale the "bluegrass harmonic minor."

The minor scale we play most often in bluegrass, country, folk, etc., is the natural minor scale. Example 1, on the next page, shows an E natural minor. This really is just a G major scale starting on an E note. This is also call E Aeolian (Mode).

The natural minor scale will cover almost everything we would ever need. But sometimes we have a 1/5 progression in a minor key. For example, a song might go from Em (1) to B (5). This occurs in "Wayfaring Stranger" and in the B part of "Blackberry Blossom," among others. Here are the last eight bars of "Wayfaring Stranger":

Em Em Em Em
B B Em Em

Here are the first four bars for the B part of "Blackberry Blossom" (we'll look at "Blackberry" in the next issue):

Em Em Em B

Let's look at what happens when we go to that B chord. A B chord triad is made up of the notes B, D# and F#. Our E natural minor scale includes B and F#, but not D#. That D# is a very strong note: if we can hit that note somewhere in our scale it will clearly indicate that we have moved to a different harmonic place, in this case to the 5 chord (B).

It turns out that E harmonic minor does the trick. To make the harmonic minor we take our natural minor and change one note: D to D#. Example 2 on the next page shows the E harmonic minor scale.

Since we're playing this scale over a B chord, we want to start it on one of the notes that make up a B chord. Example 3 shows the E harmonic minor scale starting on a B note.

We would call Example 3 the fifth mode of the E harmonic minor scale because we're starting the scale on the 5th scale degree (B).

This is cool, because we've left our natural minor scale intact and just changed one note to make it harmonic minor: we basically just changed the 7th degree of the scale from D to D#. But now we have one final problem to deal with.

As you play the E harmonic minor, listen to the interval between the C and the D#. This sound is much too exotic for our ears in the bluegrass/country/folk world. This is a minor third interval: there is a step and a half between the notes. That interval in this particular scale begins to sound too much like Gypsy or middle Eastern music and less like Kentucky. The way we solve the problem is that we take out the 6th degree (in this case the C note), which effectively eliminates the offending minor third interval but leaves the note we were looking for in the first place: D# (7th degree).

Now we have what I'm calling the "Bluegrass Harmonic Minor in E" (see Example 4).

We want to be able to play this scale starting on the notes that make up a B chord (the 5 chord in this case): B, D# and F#. Example 5 shows the E bluegrass harmonic minor starting on B, Example 6 starting on D#, and Example 7 starting on F#.

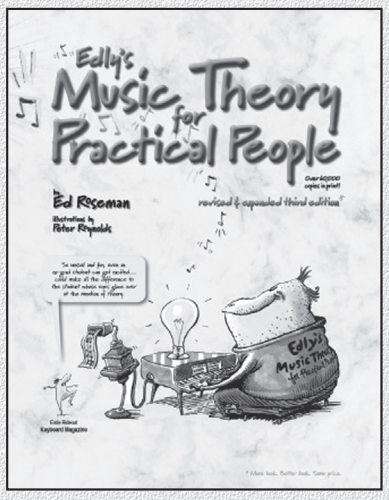
This altered harmonic minor scale gives us the maximum number of notes that we can play over a 5 chord in a minor key without leaving the realm of a "bluegrass tonality."

In a 1minor/5 progression (Em/B) I will usually play E natural minor over the E minor and switch to "bluegrass harmonic minor" over the B.

Finally, Example 8 shows are the last eight bars of "Wayfaring Stranger" for context: I'll then give you a few examples of the last four bars using the bluegrass harmonic minor (Examples 9 through 12).

Stay tuned for the next issue, where we'll take a look at "Blackberry Blossom" using bluegrass harmonic minor and a song you would never expect to be a candidate for a harmonic minor of any kind: "The Old Home Place."

Music Theory For Practical People



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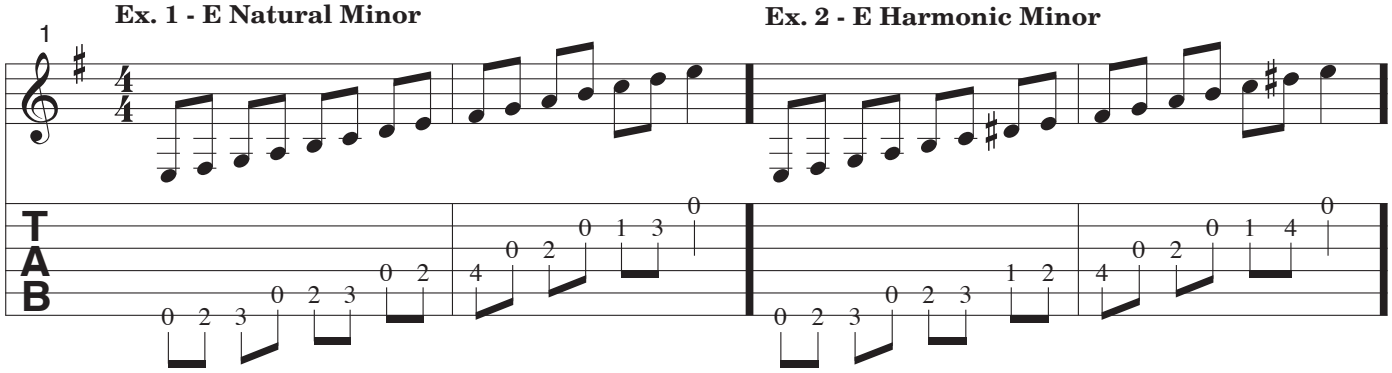
Bluegrass Harmonic Minor Examples

Audio CD
Tracks 13 - 15

Arranged by Tim May

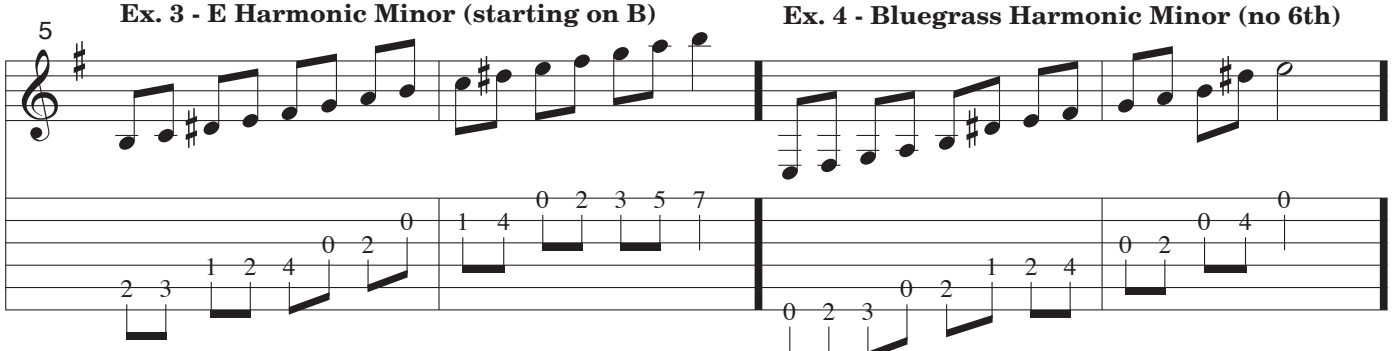
Ex. 1 - E Natural Minor

Ex. 2 - E Harmonic Minor



Ex. 3 - E Harmonic Minor (starting on B)

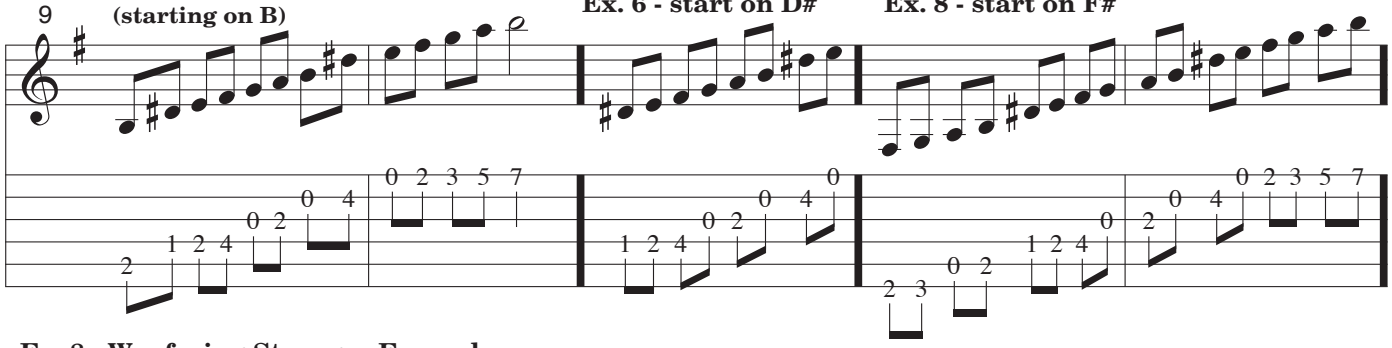
Ex. 4 - Bluegrass Harmonic Minor (no 6th)



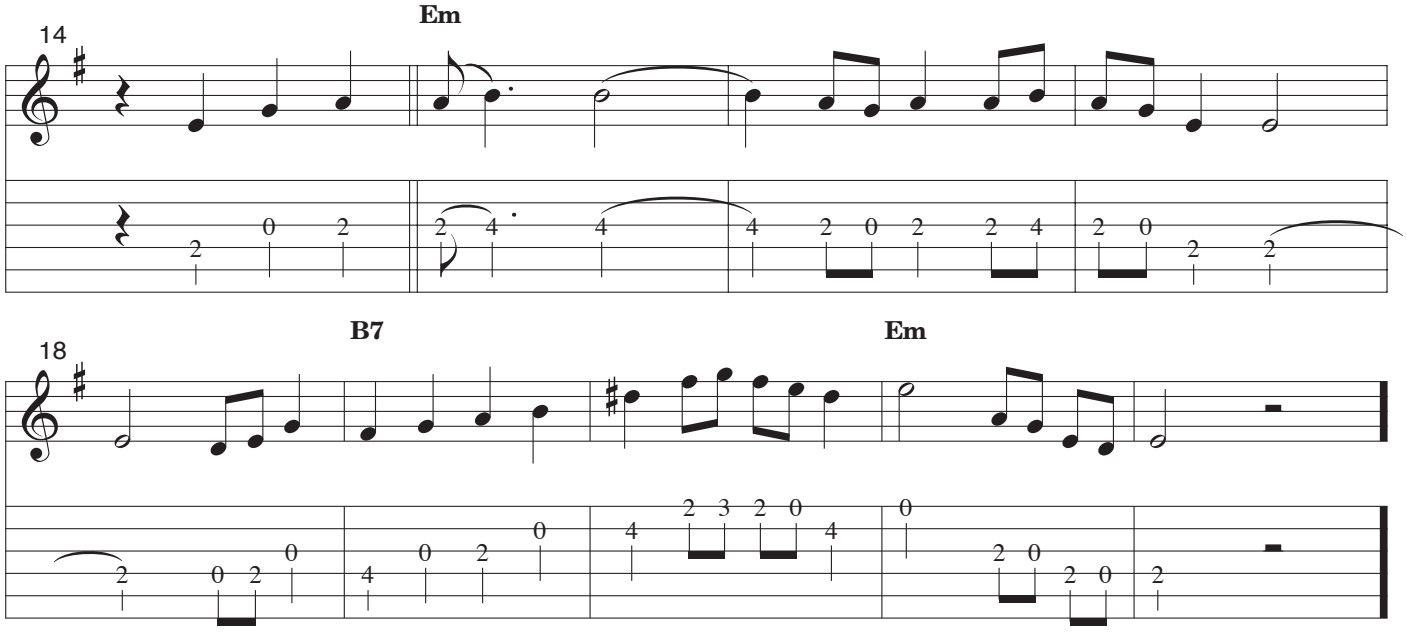
Ex. 5 - Bluegrass Harmonic Minor (starting on B)

Ex. 6 - start on D#

Ex. 8 - start on F#

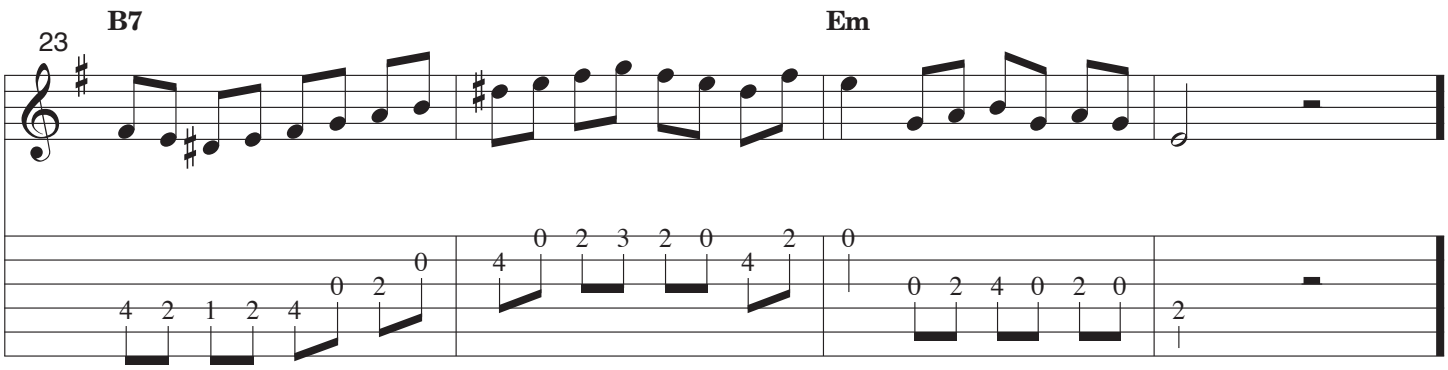


Ex. 8 - Wayfaring Stranger Example

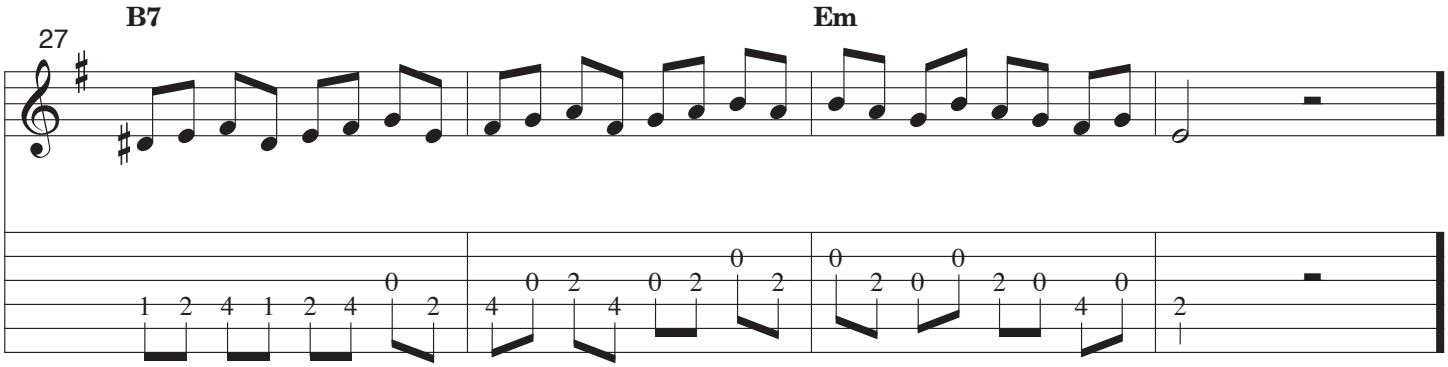


Bluegrass Harmonic Minor Examples (con't)

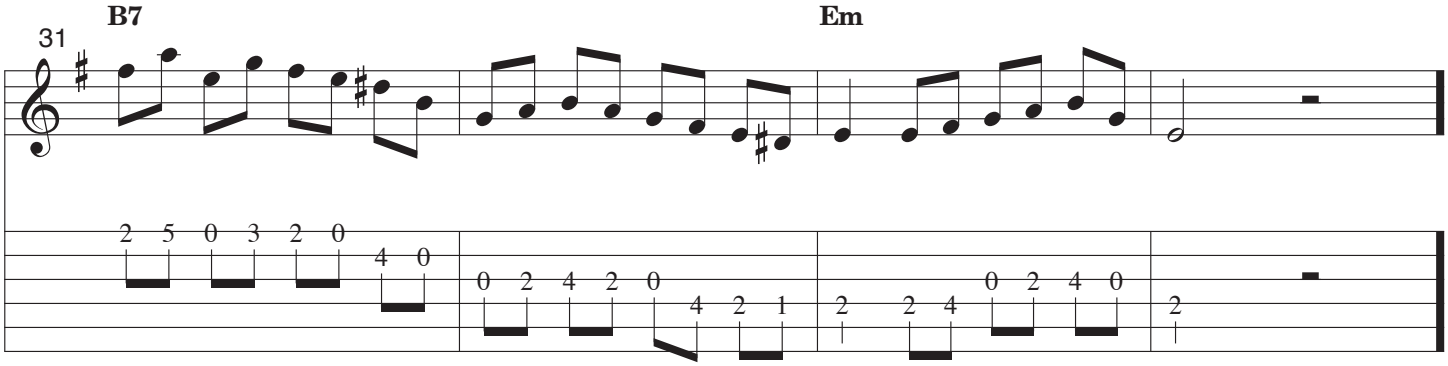
Ex. 9



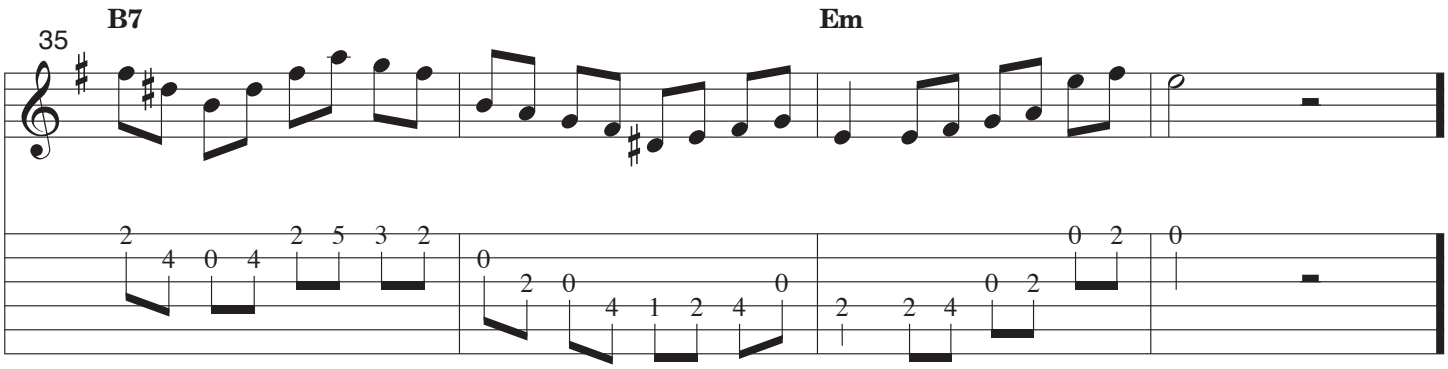
Ex. 10



Ex. 11



Ex. 12



Flatpick Profile: Caleb Smith

by Dan Miller

About a year ago I posted a bunch of photos on Facebook that I had taken at various bluegrass festivals and venues back in the early-to-mid 1980s. A couple of photos that I posted were of Marc Pruett playing at a venue in Asheville, North Carolina. Posting those photos of Marc initiated a conversation between Marc and I that led to him recommending that *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* might want to do an article about a young North Carolina picker Caleb Smith. Caleb is the guitar player in Marc's current band, Balsam Range. During his career Marc has stood on stage next to some mighty fine guitar pickers (including Bryan Sutton when Marc was a member of Ricky Skagg's band Kentucky Thunder). So, when Marc said that Caleb was worth featuring, I took his advice to heart and put Caleb's name on our featured artist list.

Over the July 4th weekend this year, we set up the *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* booth at the Red, White and Bluegrass Festival in Morganton, North Carolina. The booth was a few hundred yards from the stage, but there was a big tree between the booth and the stage. I could certainly hear the music, but I couldn't see the stage. That weekend provided a lot of great music and I was familiar with most of the bands that were on the schedule. At one point during the weekend I heard some really great music coming from the stage, but it was bit different than the mostly traditional bluegrass that I'd heard thus far that weekend. I'd not heard this band's sound before.

I had not been paying attention when the MC introduced the band and so I left the booth and walked up towards the stage to investigate. As I walked closer to the stage the guitar player took a solo that was really great. It wasn't any type of "clone solo," it was tasteful and original. Now I really thinking, "Who are these guys?" As the band members came into focus I recognized Marc Pruett on the banjo. This was the band—and the guitar player—that Marc had been telling me about! After their set I walked directly over to their merchandise table and introduced myself to Caleb and asked if we could feature him in the magazine. He agreed, I put him at the top of the list, and here we are!

Caleb Smith grew up in a musical family in western North Carolina, near Waynesville. He said, "Both of my grandfathers played the guitar and my dad is a Chet Atkins, Merle Travis, and Doc Watson finger style player. So, I grew up listening to that. On the other hand, my mom liked listening to Leo Kottke, Jim Croce, and James Taylor. So, I also listened to that kind of stuff. There were no bluegrass records in the house that I recall." Caleb started playing the guitar when he was eight so that he could participate in the music that was played at all his family's get-togethers. He said, "Whenever my family would get together, it would end up in a jam session." Caleb's father was a preacher, so much of his early experience playing the guitar was playing in church with his father while his mother and sister sang.

Since Caleb's father was a fingerstyle player, one might assume that Caleb would have started learning how to play using the fingerstyle method. However, Caleb started off with a flatpick in his hand. He said, "When I started playing I was just strumming rhythm and that appealed to me more than the fingerpicking. To this day I'm not very good at fingerpicking." Caleb said that when he started to learn how to flatpick lead lines he did notice that he was not able to get all of the notes that his dad was able to play using the fingerstyle, so he started to learn how to add notes around the melody like he heard Doc Watson play when Doc was flatpicking.

Caleb did not become interested in bluegrass-style flatpicking until he heard his first Tony Rice recording. He remembers, "When I was about 14 years old my mom took me to the library and I checked out a cassette copy of Tony Rice's *Me and My Guitar*. That recording changed my life! I heard the first four bars of 'Me and My Guitar' and I thought 'Holy Cow!' It was the first flatpicking that really turned me on. After that I wanted to listen to every recording of Tony Rice that I could find." Caleb began to learn some of Tony's signature licks by listening to recordings and by picking with his friend Zane Fairchild (banjo great Raymond Fairchild's son). Caleb said, "Zane helped me out a lot as far as the Tony Rice stuff."

Although there were a lot of flatpickers on the scene by the time Caleb as fourteen years old (in 1992), Caleb had only heard Doc Watson and Tony Rice. His fascination with the Tony Rice recordings and the Tony Rice style led him to develop a style of playing that was similar to Tony's. However, when I heard Caleb play this past July 4th weekend, he did not sound too much like Tony Rice at all. When asked how he was able to move away from the Tony Rice approach, Caleb said, "My first exposure to all of the classic bluegrass songs was through the Bluegrass Album Band recordings, and that was all Tony Rice. But then when I started jamming with older guys they recommended that I listen to Flatt & Scruggs and the original bands. When I started listening to those older recordings I thought, 'Wow, these guys really had it going on!' I started listening to melody lines and the fiddle solos of guys like Paul Warren and Benny Martin. I moved away from playing like Tony and tried to embellish the melody like those old fiddle players would do it."

Many young players start their career by copying Tony Rice. Somewhere along the way a teacher, mentor, or older player will usually take them aside and gently recommend that they work on developing their own style instead of just always copying Tony Rice. We've told that story time and time again in this magazine and so I asked Caleb if there was anyone in his life who recommended that he move away from the Tony Rice style and work on developing the Caleb Smith style. He said, "Yes, it was Tony Rice!" Years ago one of Caleb's good friends was designing Tony Rice's first website. On one of his friend's trips to meet with Tony regarding the website, Caleb went along. During the visit Caleb got an opportunity to pick with Tony. After they played together, Tony said, "A lot of the stuff you are playing sounds like me sitting there. You don't want people to say, 'You play just like Tony Rice.'" Tony admitted

to Caleb that Clarence White had given him the exact same advice decades before. Caleb said, "I think that Tony is awesome, his music really makes my blood pump. But I listened to his advice and tried to take my playing in a different direction."

After meeting with Tony, Caleb started listening more to players like David Grier, Dan Crary, and Jim Hurst. Tony's jazz recordings also led him to listen to players like Django Reinhardt, John Scofield and Pat Metheny. Currently Caleb's favorite guitar player is Reggie Harris (see article in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, Volume 15, Number 5). Caleb said, "Reggie is the most versatile guitar player I know. He can play any style, at any speed, with any tone." Regarding his current approach to creating a solo, Caleb said, "I try to draw from all of it."

In addition to drawing from guitar players Caleb said that he also likes to listen to fiddle players. He said, "There were some old fiddle players that used to tell me, 'You play great, but you need to learn how to play the melody.' So, I took their advice and started learning obscure fiddle tunes. You can't play Tony Rice licks over many of these old obscure fiddle tunes like 'Cross-eyed Fiddler' or 'Cricket on the Hearth.' So I try to learn the melody and then embellish it." In addition to Reggie Harris, Caleb said that he is currently inspired by fiddler Shad Cobb and mandolin player Darren Nicholson.

To date Caleb has spent time in two different bands. He joined the first band, Harvest, when he was in his early twenties. Harvest was a bluegrass gospel band that worked roughly 75 to 100 days a year for five years and recorded three CDs. About two months after Caleb left the band he got a call from Buddy Melton inviting him to a jam session at Darren Nicholson's house. When he showed up at the jam the other musicians who were there to jam were Marc Pruett and Tim Surrett. Caleb said, "All of us had just come off the road and had left our old bands at about the same time. We had all come from so many different musical backgrounds that when we played together we didn't sound like anyone else. It was really good stuff."

The five musicians, who all lived in the same town, decided to form a band and call it Balsam Range, after the range of mountains that run through their part of the country. Balsam Range is: Caleb Smith on guitar, Marc Pruett on banjo, Tim Surrett on bass, Darren Nicholson on mandolin, and Buddy Melton on fiddle. The band truly has its own sound. It is unique enough to catch your ear and captivating enough to hold your attention. Caleb's guitar style is a big part of the band's sound.

Caleb Smith

Balsam Range has been on fire. Four of their tunes have charted at the number one position on various charts. Most recently, their tune "Trains I Missed" charted number one on the *Bluegrass Music Profiles* chart, the *Bluegrass Unlimited* chart, the *Roots Music Report* chart, and the *Alternate Roots Magazine* chart. Their tune "Gonna Be Movin" also recently charted number one on *The Singing News* bluegrass chart. The crowd at the Red, White and Bluegrass Festival was going crazy over this band. If you get the chance to see them, don't pass it up. Visit www.balsamrange.com for more information.

In addition to being a top-notch musician and songwriter, Caleb is also a studio engineer and a guitar builder. His engineer work began several years ago when studio owner Bill McDonald moved his Heart Wood Studios from Raleigh to Asheville, NC, and asked if Caleb would come into the studio to play guitar and sing on some sessions. After Caleb had done some of that work Bill asked if Caleb would like to learn how to work with the Pro Tools recording software and help out with some of the engineering work. Caleb agreed and for a while he was working about three days a week in the studio, but lately he has become so busy with his guitar building that he is spending more time in the guitar shop than in the studio.

Caleb's interest in repairing and building guitars was born out of necessity. He said, "Five or six years ago I needed some fret work on my guitar and all of the repairmen that I knew at that time were too busy to take on the job. So I got a Stewart-MacDonald catalog and ordered some fret wire and some files and did the job myself."

The fret job led to work with his saddle and nut, fixing a cracked bridge, and then a neck reset. That work gave Caleb the confidence to try and build a guitar from scratch. He said, "About 15 years ago my dad built a classical guitar and he still had some of his tools and jigs. So, about two and half years ago I decided to try to build a Dreadnought guitar as a winter project. I used the book *Guitarmaking Tradition and Technology* by William Cumpiano and Jonathan Natelson. Later I talked with Lynn Dudenbostel and he recommended that I read that book. I was happy that I already had it." Caleb's first guitar was a mahogany/Adirondack Dreadnought and he said, "It turned out pretty good for my first guitar."

Caleb was playing his hand-built guitar while giving a lesson to a student and the student asked if Caleb would build a guitar for him. That request led to others. By the time he had built number 4 Caleb was playing them on stage with the band. People in the audience would ask about his guitar and, as a result, even more orders came in. He is currently working to complete numbers 5 and 6 and has sold through number 12.

In order to learn the luthier trade Caleb has continued his education by spending time talking with experienced builders who are willing to share their knowledge. He credits Lynn Dudenbostel, John Arnold, Wayne Henderson, Jimmy Edmonds, and Don Wilson as being very helpful in answering his questions and sharing materials. Caleb said, "Don Wilson and Wayne Henderson are the two that I rely on the most. They have both bent over backwards to help me."

Caleb built his first four guitars based on the mid-to-late 1930s Martin design (1934 to 1938). He said, "I have a Hacklinger thickness gauge and I have used it to measure the top, back, and sides of old Martin guitars. When I built the first four guitars I used the specs from the late 30s Martins. For guitars 5 and 6 I am using specs from the early 40s Martins." When asked about the differences in the two design eras, Caleb said, "Martin moved the X-brace back a half-inch in late 1938. In the early 40s the tops, backs, and sides are substantially thinner and they added the 'popsicle' brace." Caleb made the change from the 30s specs to the 40s specs at the request of the buyer. He said, "I own a 1940 D-18 that I bought from the original owner. It is a very balanced guitar that is loud and has a good dry tone. The customers who ordered numbers 5 and 6 wanted me to build them guitars that were just like my D-18."

In conducting his research Caleb has had the opportunity to play and measure many old Martin guitars that were built between 1934 and 1944. When asked about his design preference, he said that he now prefers the specs from the early 1940s. He said, "With the forward X-brace the bass tones can sometimes be overwhelming. It is great for jamming, but not for playing into a microphone. I think that the rear shifted X-brace evens out the tone more and gives the guitar a nice mid-range punch." Although Caleb prefers the X-brace position and side, top, and back thickness of the early 1940s Martin guitars, he does not use the popsicle brace (or "transverse brace" Martin added in 1940) in his guitars. He said, "The 30s Martin did not use the popsicle brace, but the neck block was a quarter of an inch wider. I don't use the popsicle brace in my guitars, but I do use the wider neck block. I don't think that it matters if the brace is there or not. I chose not to put it in because by not using it, it saves wood and it saves time."

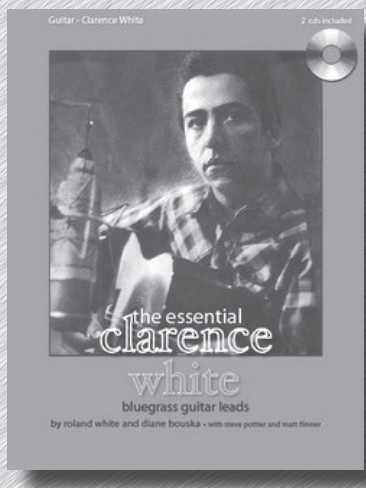
Although Caleb owns a 1940 Martin D-18 (a mahogany guitar) as well as a 1944 Martin D-28 (a rosewood guitar), he said that he generally prefers the sound of mahogany guitars. When making his material choices he has recently experimented with making his bridge plate out of yellow locust. He said, "I found an old yellow locust fence post that was quarter sawn and I cut a bridge plate out of that. Since it is a stiffer wood than maple, I made the plate thinner. The guitar that I used that bridge plate on has more of a punchy projection. Later I found out that John Arnold has used yellow locust for his bridge plates as well."

After Caleb finishes the two guitars that are currently on his workbench (numbers 005 and 006), he plans on making the next guitar out of Brazilian rosewood. He plans to keep that one for himself. Since its number will be 007, he is going to refer to it as the "secret agent" guitar.

When I heard Caleb play at the Red, White and Bluegrass Festival, he was playing number 002 and it sounded really great. With his enthusiasm and willingness to learn from some of the best builders in the country, I can imagine that Caleb's guitars are only going to get better from here.

In terms of a music career in bluegrass, Caleb Smith is doing it all. He records, performs, writes songs, sings, engineers, and builds. And he does it all very well! The next time you see Balsam Range playing at a festival in your area, or in a local venue, I highly recommend that you check these guys out. Not only will you hear a solid, tight, and entertaining bluegrass band that does it their own way, you will get the opportunity to hear a talented up-and-coming guitar player playing songs that he has written himself on a guitar that he built himself!

For this issue's audio CD and transcription Caleb provided us with a tune he calls "Tight Run" that will be on his upcoming solo project. On the first track he plays the tune slowly. This is the version that he has transcribed for us. On the second track Caleb plays the tune up-to-speed and is joined by Balsam Range band mates Darren Nicholson on mandolin and Buddy Melton on bass. They recorded at Heart Wood Studios in Asheville, North Carolina, with Bill McDonald engineering.



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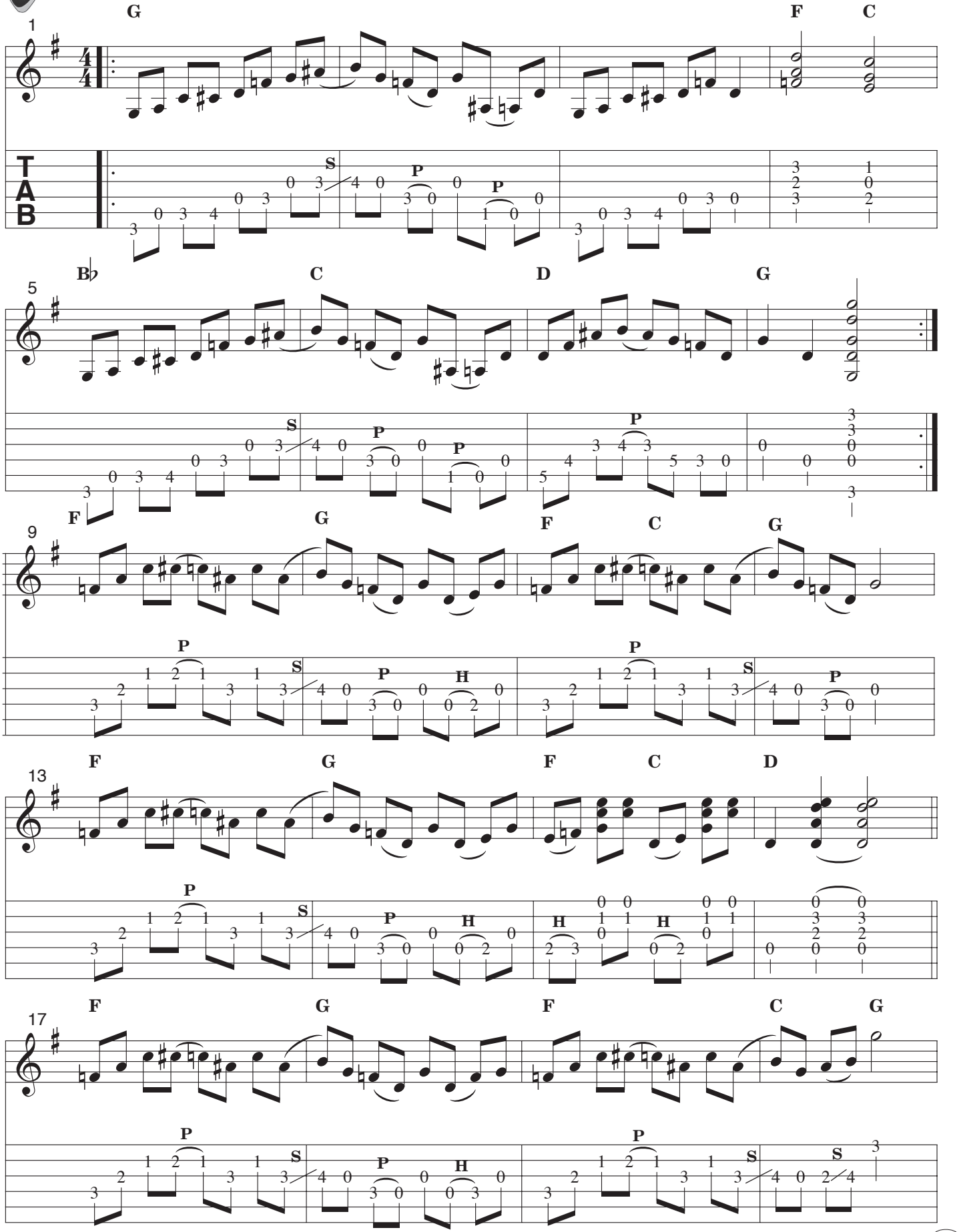
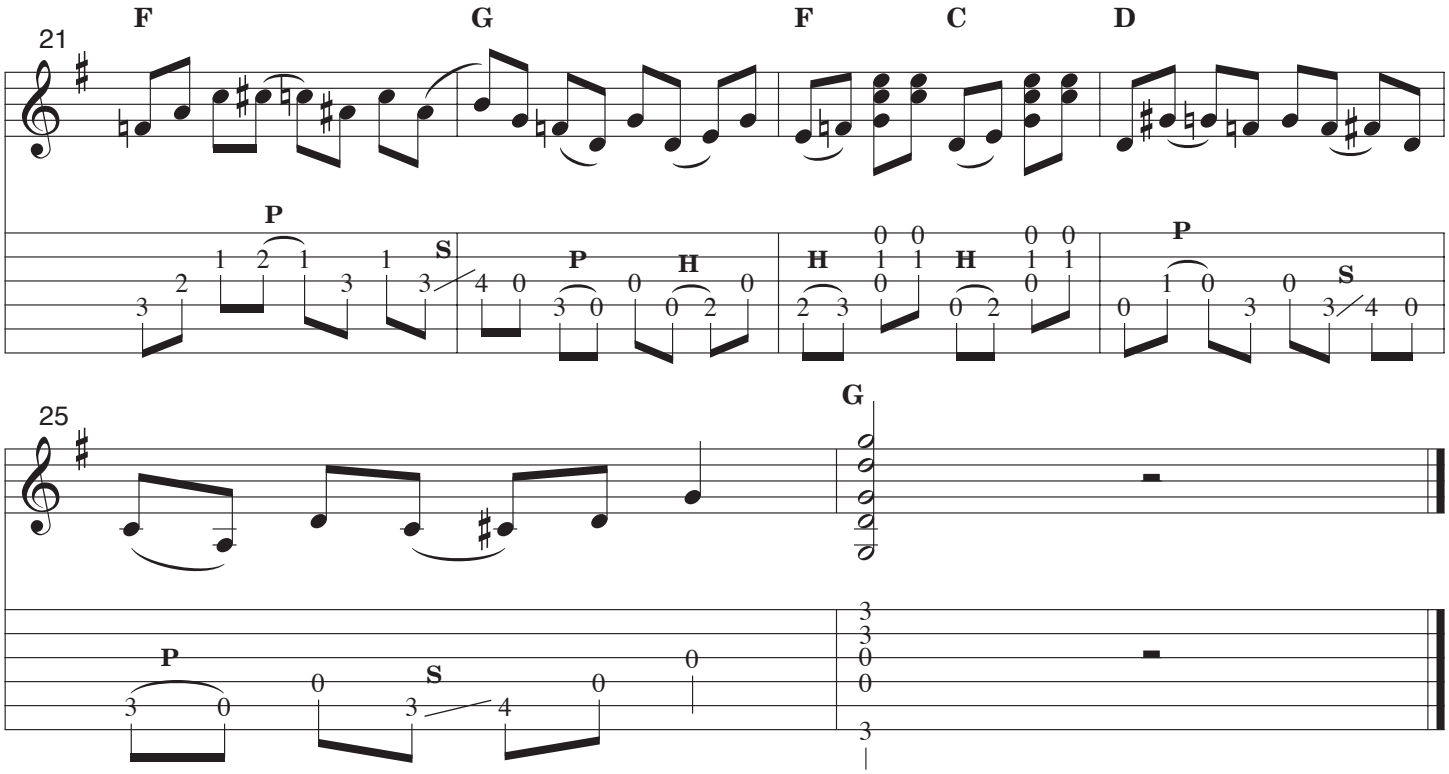
Audio CD
Track 16

Tight Run

Written by Caleb Smith

Tight Run (con't)

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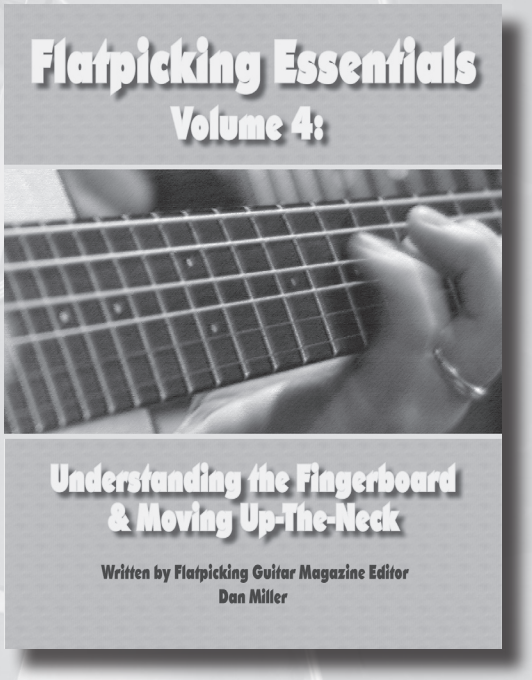

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THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

Hop High Ladies

During a long car drive the other day I gave a fresh listen to David Grier's "old-time"' CD *Hootenanny*. It is a brilliant and intimate recording that features Grier paired with master traditional players Tim O'Brien and Dirk Powell. And this tune (also known as "Have You Seen The Devil Uncle Joe" and "Miss McCleod's Reel") is one they covered.

The track opens with Tim and Dirk playing the melody together (on bouzouki and fiddle). It's at a brisk tempo and it's got some serious old-time mojo. This arrangement mirrors their take on the tune.

Technically this is a great exercise in jumping between 1st and 2nd positions—something which the key of D on the guitar really lends itself to. As I mentioned in my last column ("Fisher's Hornpipe"), deciding when to hit B notes on the 4th fret of the G string vs. the open 2nd string is an important arranging choice for serious flatpickers. Notice how often we do this here (and likewise with the C note on the 5th fret of the G string).

As always, dynamics are key to getting a tune like this to sing. To give you a jump on them I've indicated the several accented notes in the tab.

Postscript: Most versions of "Miss McLeod's" swap halves and start with what we call the B-part. Years ago I recorded a modal open-tuned version this tune on my album *Fun Songs & Fancy Pickin'*.

Orrin Star (www.orrinstar.com) is an award-winning guitar, banjo & mandolin player based in the Washington, DC area. The 1976 National Flatpicking Champion, he has toured and recorded widely, is the author of Hot Licks for Bluegrass Guitar, and performs mostly solo and duo. He offers private music instruction both in person and online.

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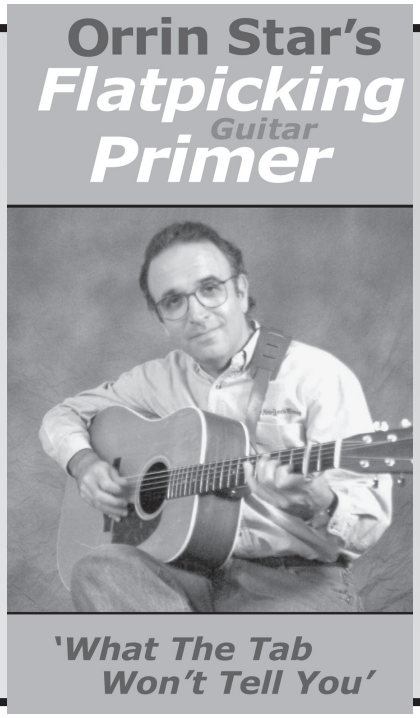
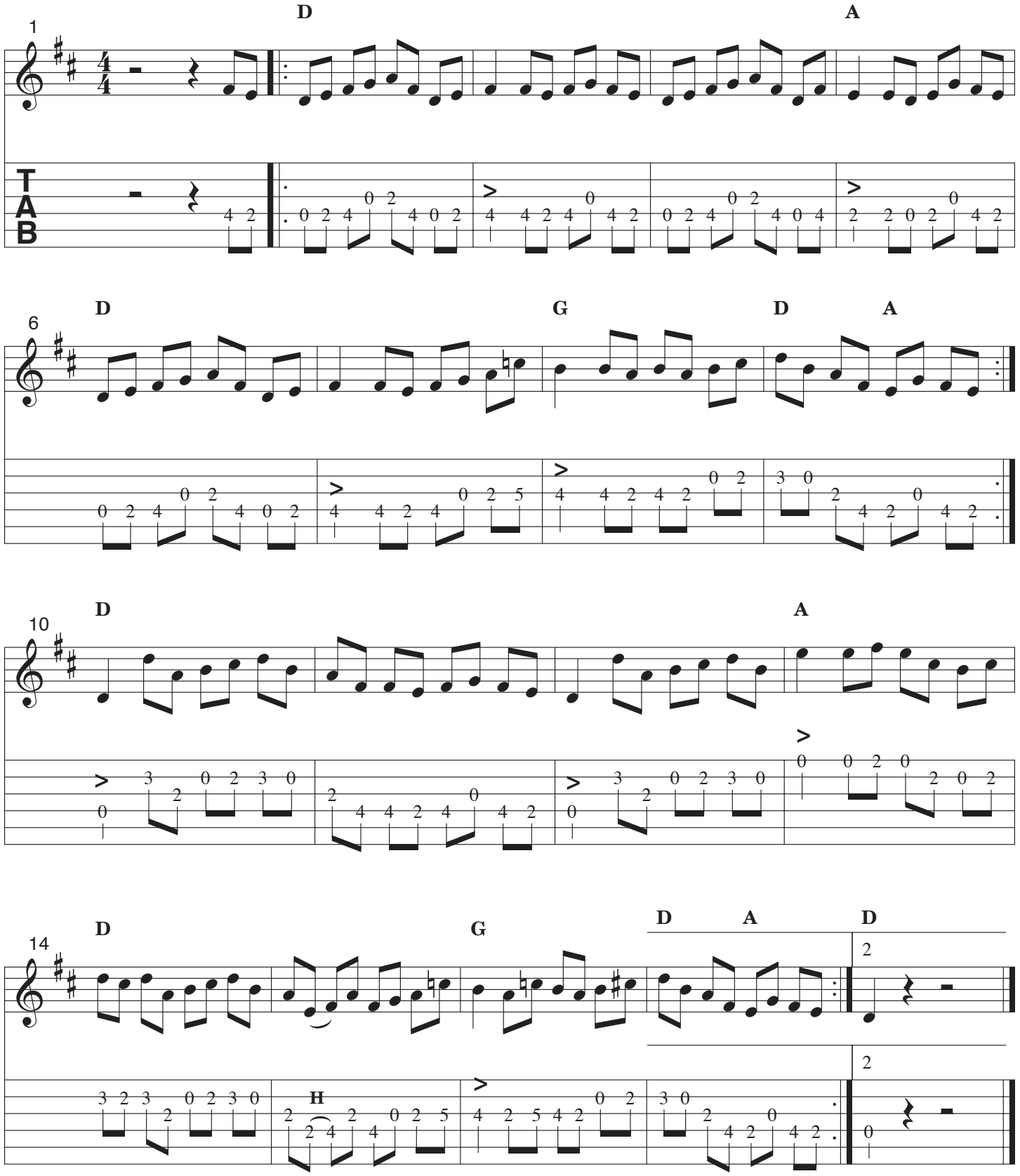


Audio CD
Tracks 18 & 19

Hop High Ladies

Arranged by Orrin Star

> = accented note

Fair & Tender Ladies Backup (Fingerstyle)

by Dix Bruce

Most of the music I've played in my life has been on a guitar, played with a little hunk of plastic in my right hand. There have been many occasions, however, when I've set the flatpick aside (I probably just put it in my pocket) and played the guitar with my bare fingers. Fingers on steel strings yield a much different sound than a flatpick. It's a lighter, more delicate timbre and very appropriate for certain types of music. A rudimentary ability to play finger-style accompaniment and leads is a very useful skill for any guitarist to have. In this column, let's temporarily lay aside our flatpicks and learn a couple of accompaniment fingerstyle patterns for the song "Fair and Tender Ladies."

While you are working with the fingerstyle arrangements, keep in mind that another variation you can use to great sonic advantage is to combine the finger-style with the flatpick-style. Hold the flatpick between your thumb and index finger and do the finger pluck with fingers two, three, and four. It works great for back up rhythm purposes. You can also hold the flatpick in the same way and combine it with the arpeggio pattern we will look at. A lot of advanced players shift back and forth between straight flatpicking and this hybrid technique. I've seen several great players use it for chicken pickin'. It'll probably seem cumbersome at first to hold and flatpick and also use your fingers. But, like anything else, it'll get better with a little work. I'll demonstrate both basic flatpick hybrid patterns on the recording.

"Fair and Tender Ladies" is a beautiful old folk song that crept into the bluegrass repertoire in the early sixties through the playing of The Country Gentlemen. I included a version of it in my P*arking Lot Pickers' Songbooks*. Take a look at the arrangement below. The arrangement we are going to work with is in the key of D and includes the chords D, A7 and Em.

We are going to explore two different fingerstyle patterns. For the first pattern we'll play a fingerstyle version of the typical bass note strum accompaniment technique that you're probably familiar with. Instead of playing the bass notes with a flatpick and then strumming a chord, let's play the bass note with the thumb of our picking hand and then, in place of the strummed chord, pluck strings 1, 2, and 3 at the same time. Just like with the typical flatpick pattern, we'll play the root bass note first, do the finger pluck, play the alternate bass note or the fifth of the chord, and follow that with another finger pluck. For the finger pluck your third finger will play the 1st string, your second finger will play the 2nd string, and your first finger will play the 3rd string. You can see what those patterns look like on the three chords of "Fair and Tender Ladies" in the first two measures of each line on page 48.

Familiarize yourself with the patterns before you attempt playing the song. To hear this and the following pattern played, live, in stereo, and in living color, check out the accompanying FGM audio CD.

The complete "Fair and Tender Ladies" with the accompaniment patterns tabbed out is on page 49. Play through it slowly at first and then gradually build up your speed. "Fair and Tender Ladies" is usually performed at a slow to moderate tempo.

Once you feel comfortable playing the basic pattern you might want to try an arpeggiated pattern. It's a little more challenging than the basic accompaniment pattern but it can add a very nice and slightly different texture to a song. To play the arpeggio pattern we'll play the bass notes just like in the previous pattern but we'll play strings 1, 2, and 3, individually in place of the finger pluck. Where before all the notes were all quarter notes counted "one, two, three, four," now all the notes are eighth notes counted "one and two and three and four and."

The arpeggio pattern is written out in measures 3 and 4 of each line on page 48. Picking hand finger numbers are shown between the standard notation and the tablature.

Practice the arpeggio accompaniment pattern slowly at first, just like you did before with the basic accompaniment pattern. Once you can do then, try the whole song!

These accompaniment patterns are just two of hundreds, if not thousands, of possibilities.

I included a few other fingerstyle accompaniment patterns as well as other song arrangements utilizing this style in my book/CD/DVD publication *You Can Teach Yourself Country Guitar* (Mel Bay Publications).

As I mentioned above, I'm primarily a flatpicking guitarist. However, in order to keep working over the years, I found it useful and even necessary to have at least a passing ability to play other guitar sounds. Bandleaders and singers are often looking for some slightly different element to make a song sound special. These types of relatively simple fingerstyle accompaniments can sometimes do the trick. Think of them as different tonal colors that you can offer. And remember: every little bit to learn increases your repertoire as a player makes you more versatile and useful. Good luck!

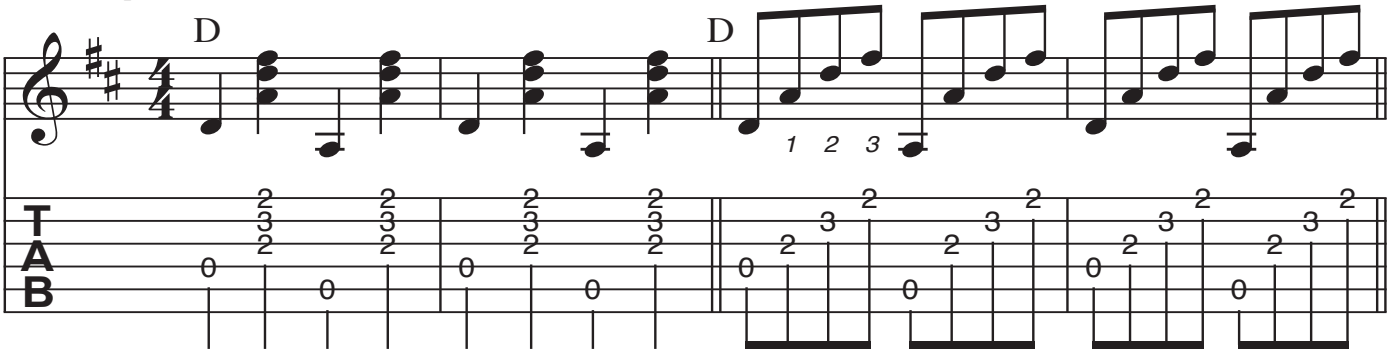
Dix's latest book/2CDs set is the brand-new 300+ page bass addition of the Parking Lot Pickers' Songbook. It teaches the basic (get it?) rudiments of how to play bass in bluegrass, country, folk, old-time, and gospel bands and includes over 215 great songs, the same songs in the other Parking Lot Pickers' Songbooks. In addition, each song is presented with a written baseline which is also recorded on the accompanying CDs. Now every member of the band—whether you're a guitarist, mandolinist, banjo player, fiddler, dobro player, or bass player—can have their own customized version of the Parking Lot Pickers' Songbook. Learn to play songs written and recorded by the giants of traditional American music: Bill Monroe, The Stanley Brothers, Flatt & Scruggs, Ralph Stanley, The Osborne Brothers, Jimmy Martin, Doc Watson, and many more. Tell your bass playing friends! www.musixnow.com.

Audio CD
Tracks 21 & 23

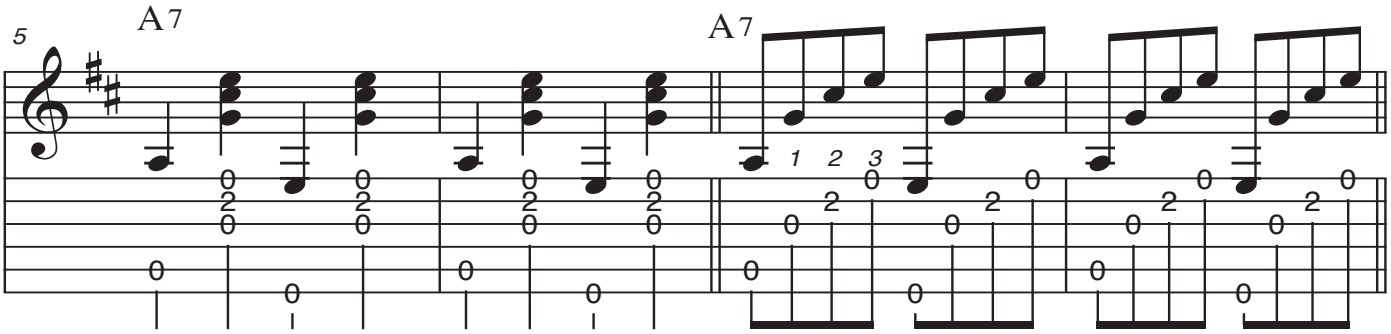
Fair & Tender Ladies — Backup Chord Patterns

Arranged by Dix Bruce

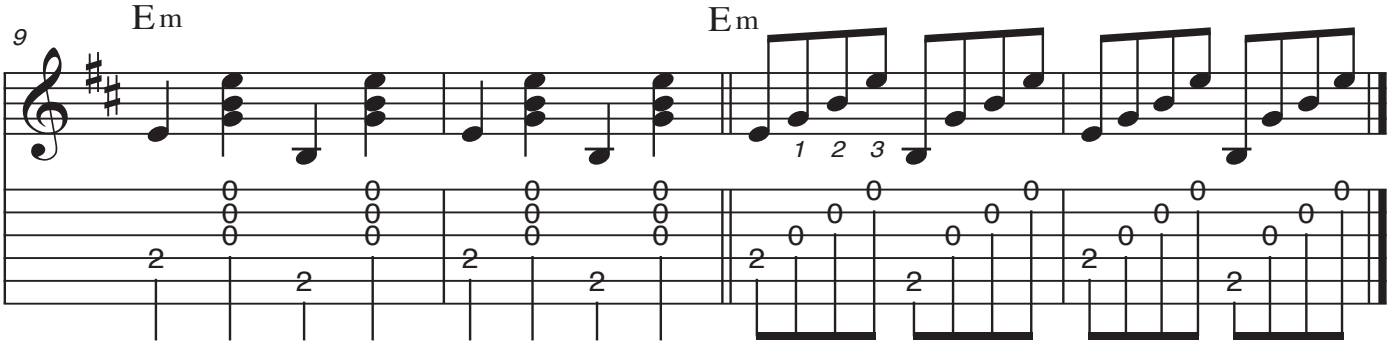
D chord patterns

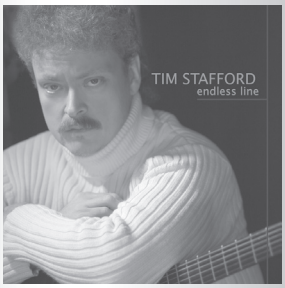


A7 chord patterns



Em chord patterns





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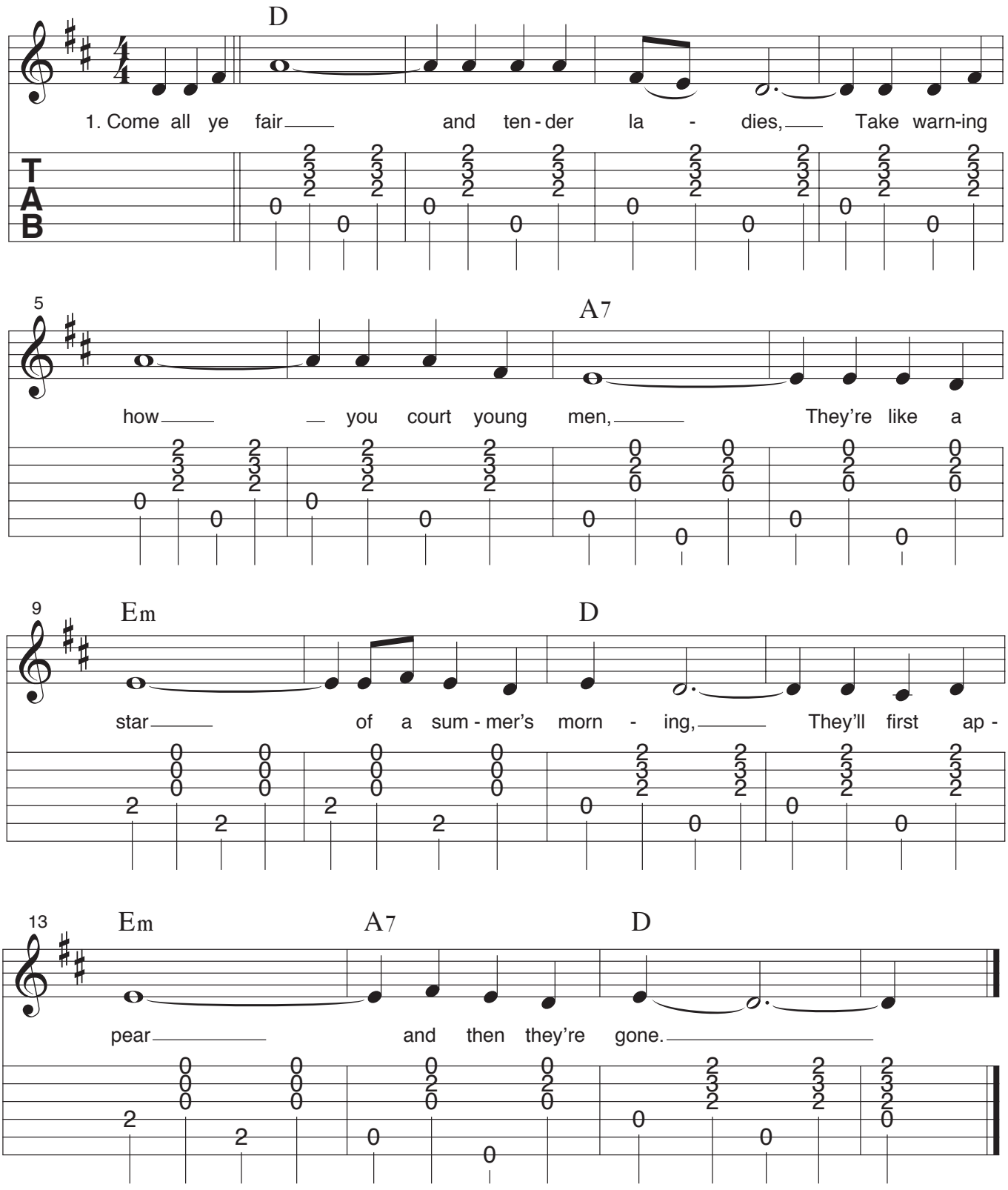
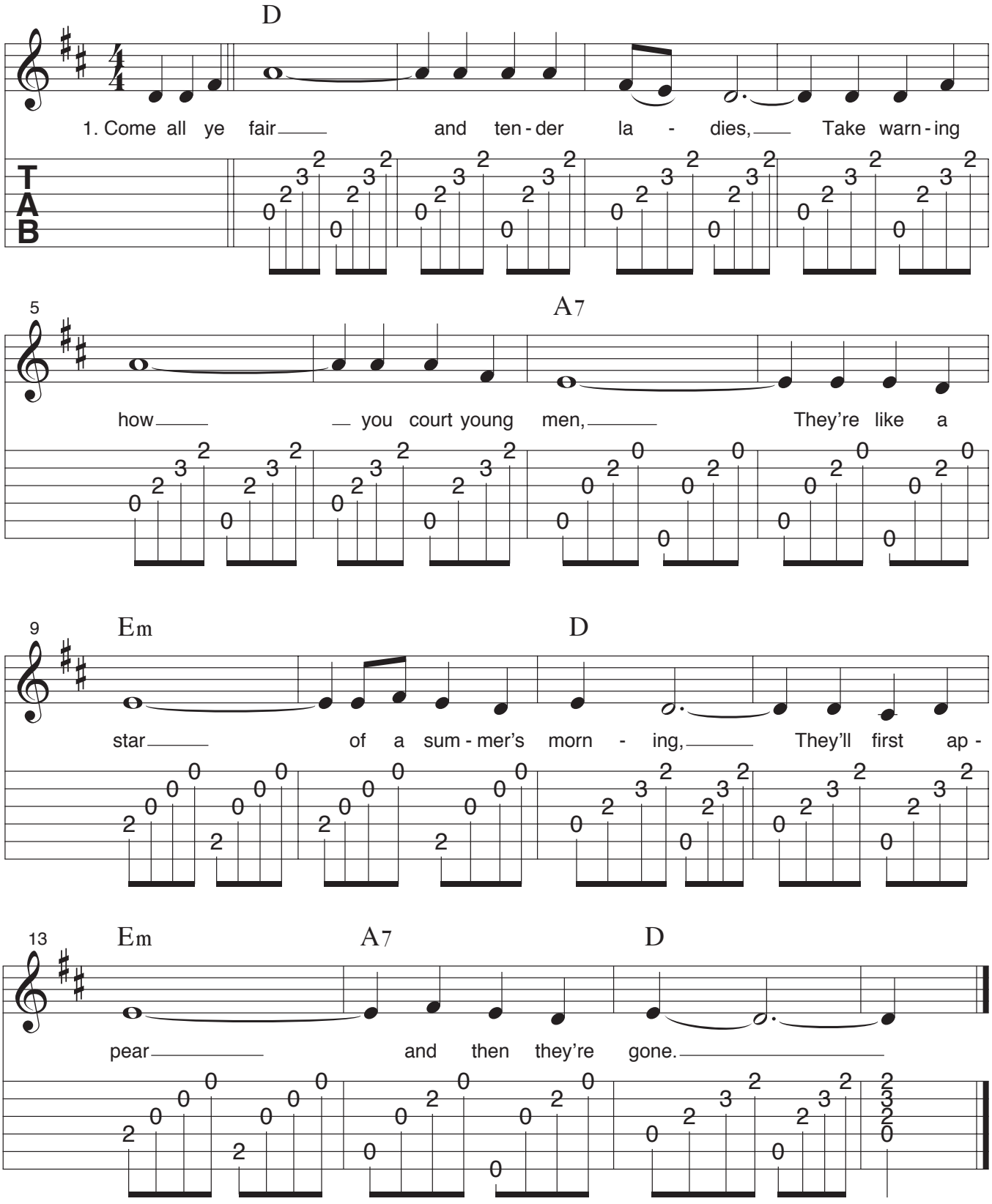
Audio CD
Track 22

Fair & Tender Ladies — Backup

Arranged by Dix Bruce



Fair & Tender Ladies — Backup (con't)

Audio CD
Track 24

PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES

by Adam Granger

A TETRALOGY OF THOMAS TUNES

Hello, there. I'm presenting here four tunes from the great northeastern Kentucky fiddler Buddy Thomas. He was an old-time fiddler who, as a working musician, deftly bridged the gap between old-time and bluegrass. He lived a short, miserable life, dying at about age 40 in 1974. Fortunately for us, in 1973, he recorded an album of 16 tunes, backed up by Leona Stamm on guitar, for Rounder Records. It is a wonderful collection, which should be on any tunesmith's short list (this averral of seminality is supported by the fact that thirteen of the sixteen tunes on the album can be found in *Granger's Fiddle Tunes for Guitar*.)

The four I have selected for this column are *Nine Miles out of Louisville*, *Frankie*, *Briarpicker Brown* and *Blue Goose*.

Nine Miles flits between first and second position in the A part. The last measures of the A and B parts deserve a comment: to stay in synch with the beat, the right hand should play those four open string notes **down-up, up-down.** *Frankie* is a sixteen-bar tune, whose B part tags differently on its repeat. Ditto *Blue Goose*. *Briarpicker Brown* contains no voodoo, just some cycling between first and second position. Okay, here comes Buddy!

READING *EASY-TAB*

Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, *Easytab* uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests per measure.

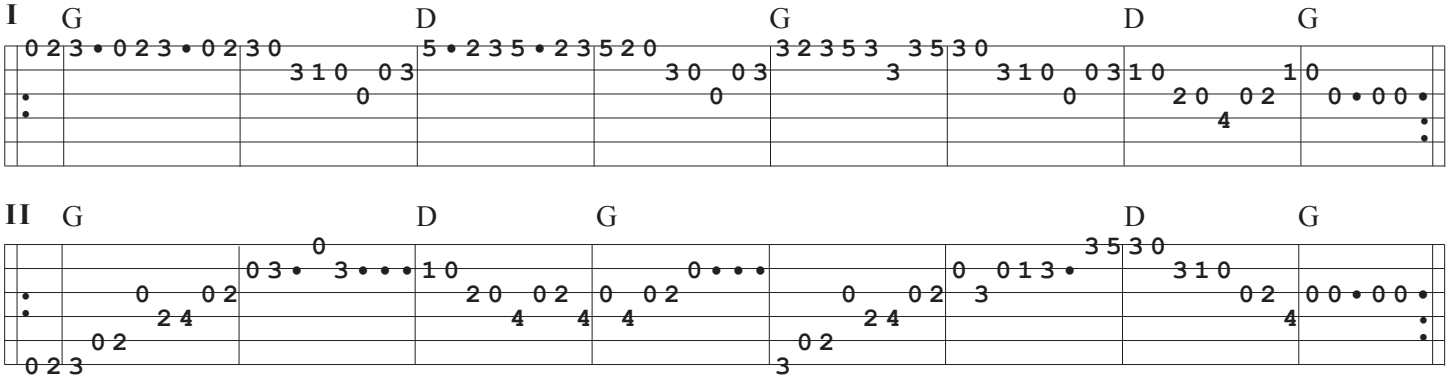
FOR BEGINNERS

Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in sync", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-down-up.

NINE MILES OUT OF LOUISVILLE

Audio CD Track 26

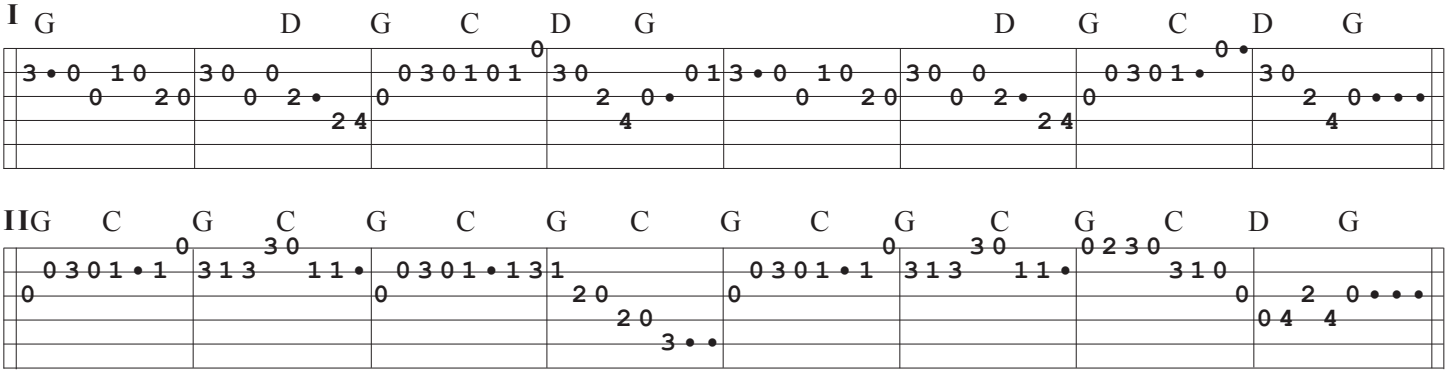
KEY: G



FRANKIE

Audio CD Track 27

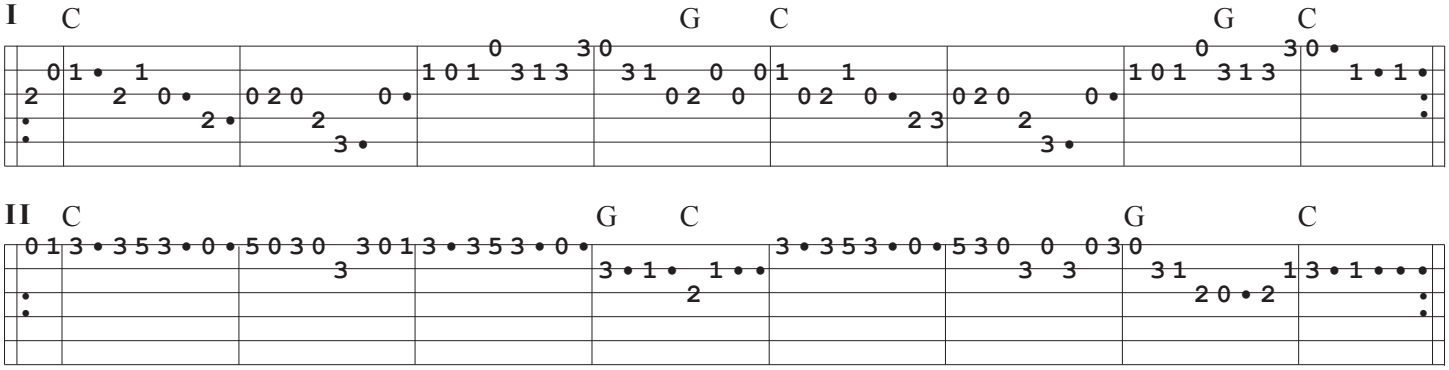
KEY: A/D(2)



BRIARPICKER BROWN

Audio CD
Track 28

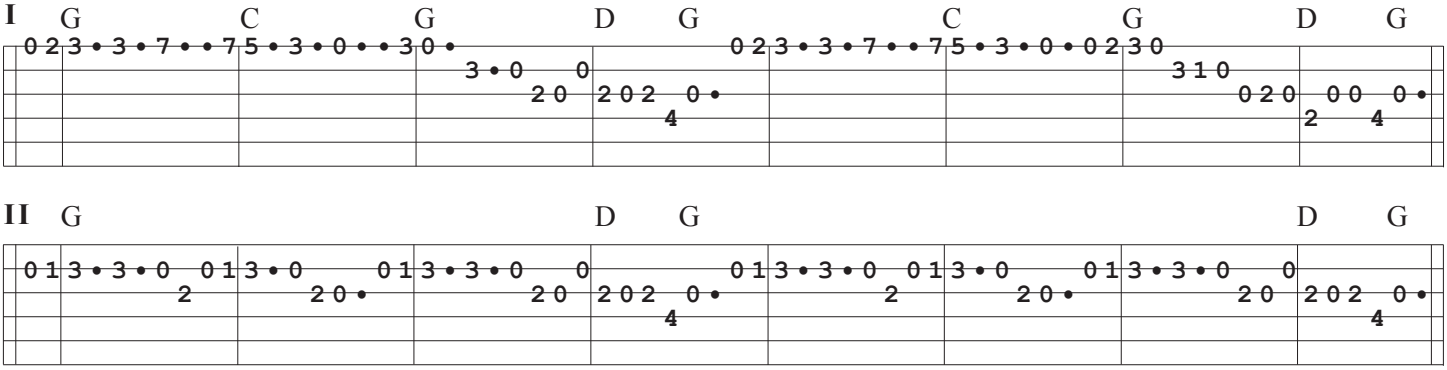
KEY: D(2)



BLUE GOOSE

Audio CD
Track 29

KEY: G



THE OLD PHILOSOPHER'S CORNER

It is very cool that Rounder Records recorded Buddy Thomas. Had they not, his legacy would have grown dimmer and dimmer and his influence more and more dilute, his oeuvre fading as though scribed on a palimpsest. If no one sees the value of the artistic output of a Buddy Thomas in his lifetime, then his music won't get recorded and preserved, and it will die with him, or perhaps a generation or two after him. If, on the other hand, just one person sees the value—and temporal nature!—of a musician's output and preserves it, its influence spreads exponentially and forever. How can one measure the hugeness of the efforts of early field recorders and archivists like Harry Smith or John Hammond? How would the history of stringed music be different had they not found and recorded the talent they did? And how many musicians have died archivally intestate and thus taken their music with them? And is that okay? Is that, for some existential reason, perhaps the way it's supposed to be?

IN DEFENSE OF EASYTAB

I get asked, from time to time, why I use my Easytab notation system instead of conventional tablature. And now, with automated computer tab programs, my adherence to a quirky, idiosyncratic style of notation—one which is far more laborious to employ, having to be entered "by hand" and all—seems all the weirder and pointless to some. I developed Easytab specifically for the flatpick genre. Since fiddle tunes and flatpicking are, generally speaking, eighth-note heavy, it made sense to establish that as the default note value, and to use a symbol of some sort—a dot, in this case—to denote an eighth-note rest. With eight notes or dots per measure, that measure can be counted "one and two and three and four and". If the right hand alternates down and up faithfully, the timing of the measure is automatically revealed as it is played. After a short learning curve, then, Easytab presents itself as a very easy-to-read, compact tab style, free of the forest of note stems seen in conventional tab.

The Buddy Thomas tunes included in Granger's Fiddle Tunes for Guitar *are:* Frankie, John Paul Jamieson, Nine Miles out of Louisville, Possum up a 'Simmon Tree, Georgia Row, Sheep and Hogs Walking through the Pasture, Briarpicker Brown, Blue Goose, Yellow Barber, Martha Campbell, Turkey in a Pea Patch, Brown Button Shoes *and* Yellow Barber. *Tunes on the album not included in* GFTFG *are* Sweet Sunny South, Kitty Puss *and* Stillhouse Branch.

John McGann's Eclectic Acoustic

Tando Derrane: Part II

Here is the next section (what we'd call the "A" section, or beginning of the actual melody section, after the introduction presented last issue) of "Tango Derrane," from the recent duo album Grove Lane (Compass Records) I recorded with my friend, National Heritage Fellowship winner and Irish button accordionist extraordinaire Joe Derrane.

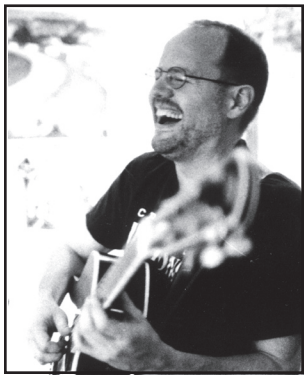
Joe provided me with a "lead sheet" which was three pages long. He notated the melody and wrote in suggested chord symbols, which I was free to interpret in my own way. Since Joe is a well-rounded musician, he was able to conceive of the actual chord changes to go with the melody (not always the case among Irish musicians). We ran through the tune a few times, as the form was a bit long and unusual, and then "rolled tape". I was also the engineer on the recording, which means I leaned over and hit the record button on my laptop!

I can't claim much pre-planning in terms of what I would do, so in every way, the rhythm performance is an improvisation, much the way that bluegrass backing would be: you know the chords you are going to play (if not the specific voicings), but your right hand patterns will probably vary from verse to chorus, etc. I have written the basic voicings, rather than notating all the rhythms or bass lines, so you'll want to refer to the recording to get the details. It's all about the ear!

In measure 2, I lead up to the Am chord with two voicings: the Em/G (read Em with G in the bass) and a G#o7 (read G# diminished 7th). This is really a harmonization of a chromatic bass line. In other words, it's a way to add motion to the existing chords without detracting from the basic harmony, much in the way you'd hear a Texas fiddle tune accompanied. The G#o7 can be seen as an inversion of an E7b9 chord, giving a V to I relationship when we hit the Am (if you care about such theoretical details!)

The other unusual voicing here is the Am7(9) in measures 5 and 6. This is a voicing that combines fingered notes up the neck with open strings; a really nice sonority. The B and E strings ringing add a lovely drone effect to the sound.

Over the next few issues, I'll present more sections of this great piece to share some ideas about different rhythms and ways to extend your chordal vocabulary.



John McGann (www.johnmcgann.com) is a Professor at Berklee College of Music. His new duo CD Grove Lane with Irish accordion legend Joe Derrane was voted #1 Irish Traditional Album of 2010 in The Irish Echo. His DVDs "Rhythm Tune Up" and "Rhythm Mandolin" and books "Sound Fundamentals" and "Developing Melodic Variations on Fiddle Tunes" are receiving great accolades. John's first solo album Upslide has been recently re-released and is available via Amazon.com and CDBaby.com as well as his own website. There are also two downloadable transcription folios (for guitar and mandolin) available for Upslide at http://download.johnmcgann.com/digStore.cfm. You can check out his custom transcription service, in which you can have any music of your choice notated, at johnmcgann.com. Drop by the web site for more bio info and lots of great free technique tips for flatpickers.

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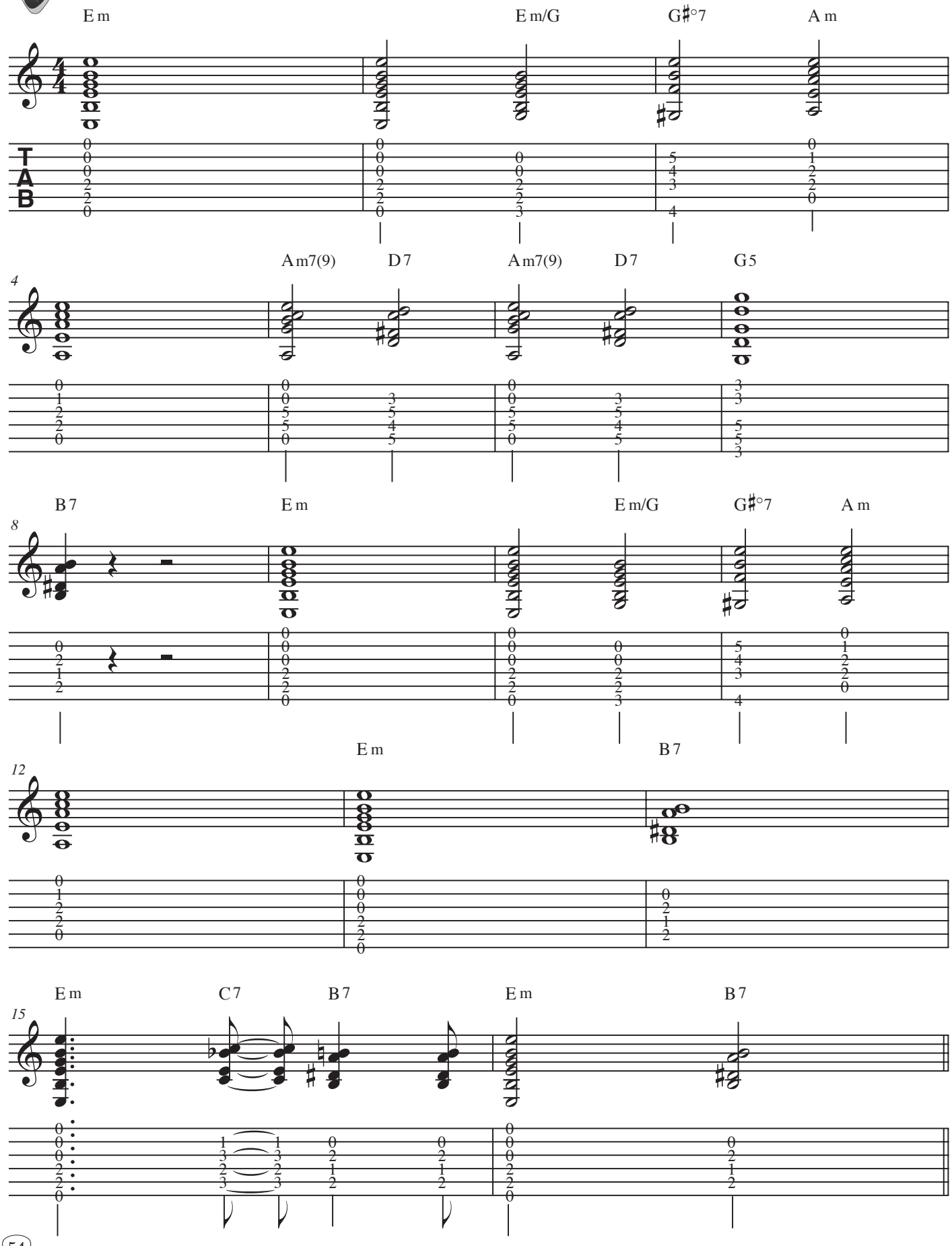
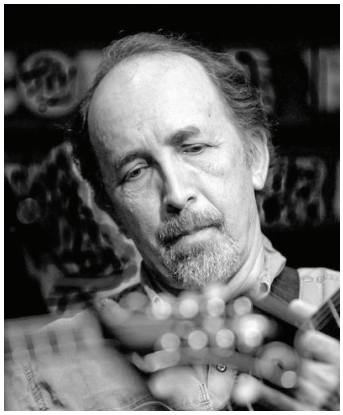
Audio CD
Track 30

Tando Derrane

Arranged by John McGann

Bluegrass Guitar

by Steve Pottier



Pickin' Up a Small Piece

I've discussed previously in this column that most bluegrass songs have their first important ("held-out") note on one of the notes of the major triad. In the key of G, that would be G, B, or D. If you think of "Sitting on Top of the World," for example, the first line is "It was in the spring..." where "spring" is the held-out note, and that note is a D (in the key of G). Since it is an important note in the melody, you would want to hit that note in your lead. If you look at banjo kickoffs, they would typically do a chromatic run up to this note, the run shown in Example 1. The main function here is to give everyone in the band a chance to start together, sort of a 1-2-3-GO! In this function, the aim is to be very clear about where the downbeat is, especially in a jam situation. Here, simpler is probably better. More complicated kickoffs are best saved for bands that rehearse regularly.

The second point is the idea of working on small melodic fragments to explore fingerings and pathways, answering the question "how do I get from point A to point B?" By developing ideas on these small segments, you find pathways for your hands to move on. Keeping the segments short makes it easier to focus on mastery (accuracy, tone, and speed). You've only got 4-8 notes; see what your hands can/will do!

The third point is that a lot of complicated or difficult music breaks down conceptually into small pieces that lead from one main note to another main note (or chord). I watched Tony Rice on his instructional DVD as he played "Shenandoah" and was struck by how he took main notes and chords and made up little runs and chord progressions to connect them. The overall effect was quite striking (it was Tony Rice...) but it seemed so much more do-able and comprehensible thinking of it in terms of short pieces connecting main pieces. A little bit like these runs up to the D note in the key of G. If you can break a song down into its main notes, you should be able to explore ways to get from one note to the other, which is the essence of improvisation.

The examples here are lead-ins or kickoffs in the key of G leading up to the D note. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but should give you some ideas of the sounds you can get out of just a few notes. The first group of examples lead to the D in the first position. Except for Example 5 they have kind of a hard-edged feel, well suited to a fast tune. Group 2 (Examples 6-12) take you to the middle of the neck. I like going here for a few reasons. First the wound G string gives a fatter, louder note than the thinner B string Second, on my guitar the middle of the neck is a sweet spot for tone. Third, playing the D on the 7th fret opens some fingering possibilities that would be difficult or impossible in first position.

The third group offers some longer, smoother runs using eighth notes. These might be a nice way to pick up a trailing run from say, the fiddle, and lead right into the guitar break. The last two examples exploit the layout of the guitar neck to move horizontally with slides.

Try to work out similar ideas for the other notes in the G triad, then try the same thing for the C triad (C, E, and G). The time spent working on these small fragments will be well worth the effort.

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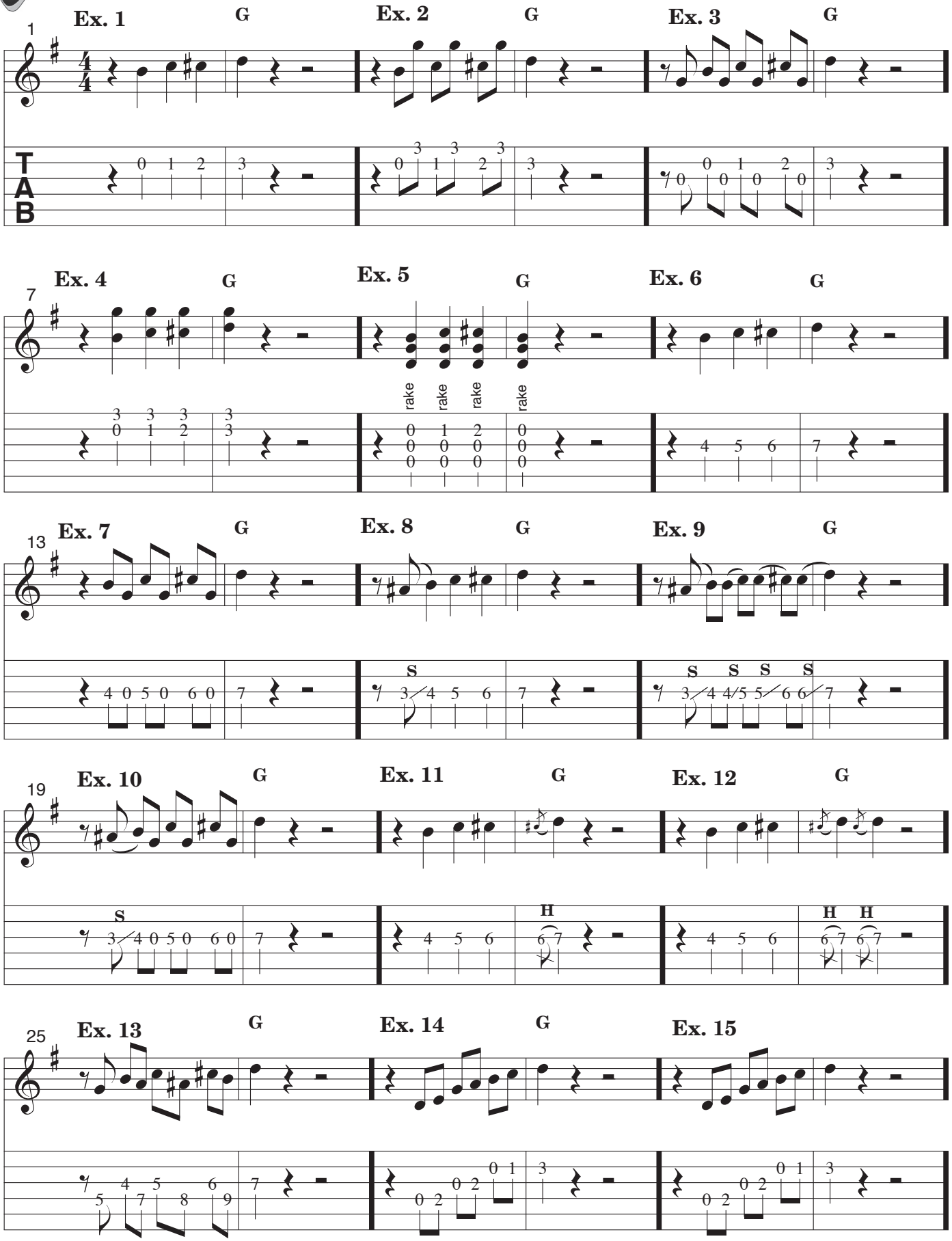
Tracks 31 to 33

Walk Up Examples

Arranged by Steve Pottier

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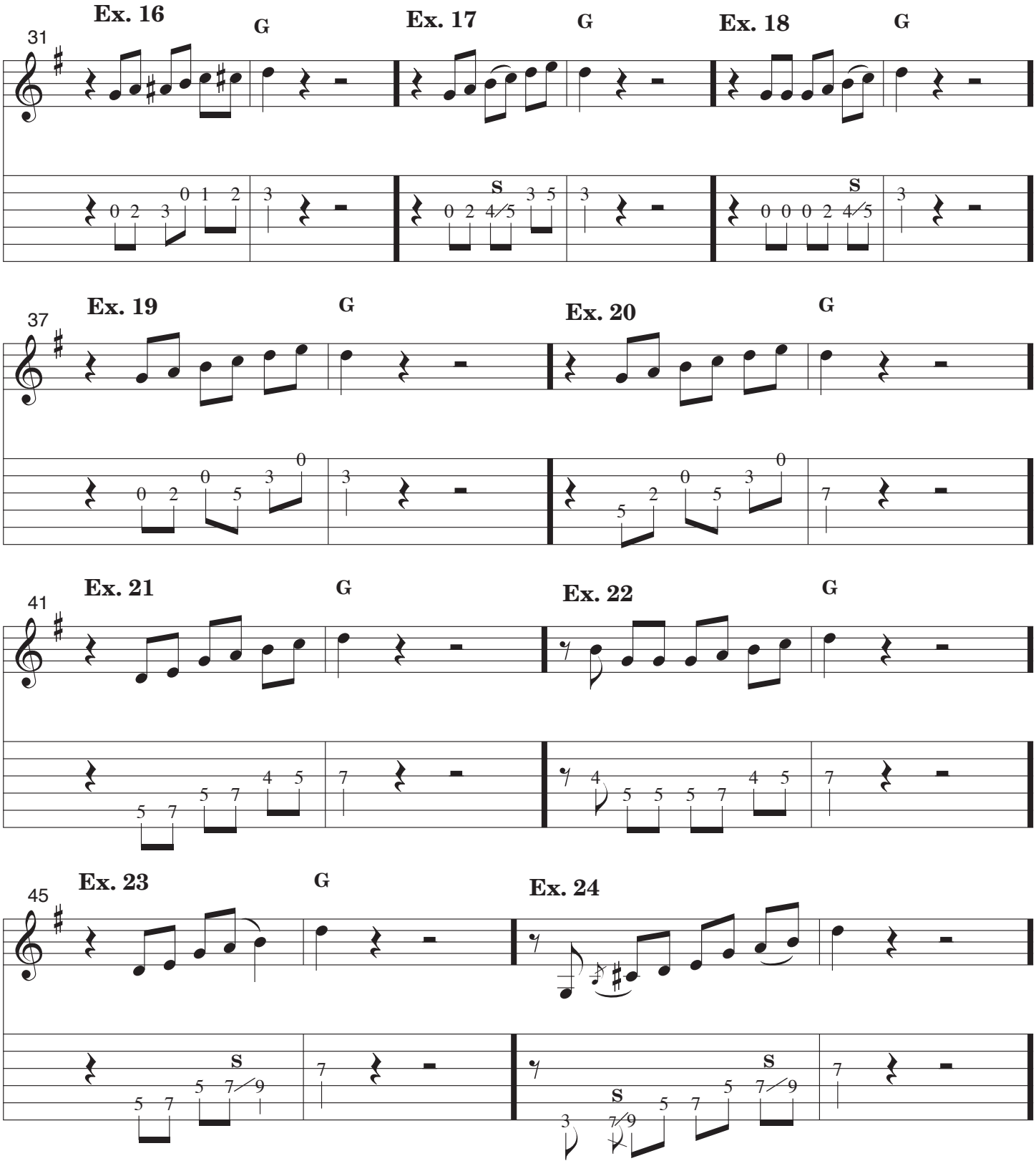

Across The Tracks In E

by Dan Crary

Audio CD
Track 34

Among the unforgettable experiences of a musician: one of those monster Canadian festivals where the whole world has come to make music and you get assignments to play in a panel of musicians from far-flung places like Rwanda and Eretria, Australia and Asia, and places west. Amazing opportunities to see world musicians close-up, get invited to join in on ancient and deeply cultural pieces, laugh and sing and play inside the music of the far reaches of humanity, I'm just back from the Winnipeg Folk Festival where I got to do all this again. Amazing.

One of the great cross-cultural experiences I saw was a show by the Del McCoury Band with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. These guys are on tour after a fusion recording that brought them together and, I have to say, it was very fine to see one of the great bluegrass bands meeting one of the great traditional jazz bands and mixing it up musically. Of course this is not exactly new: musicians from different cultures and ethnicities and politics have been crossing the various lines that divide human beings for a very long time over music. Fusion music has a kind of edgy, risky synergy; a "shouldn't work but sometimes it does" quality, with (extending the metaphor) explosive effects. Bill Monroe wasn't kidding when he said he put the blues in bluegrass music.

As a kid, I grew up in the usual blue-eyed white guy ghetto; my ticket to get over that wall and eventually get to see the world beyond it was the guitar. OMg (lower case "g" makes it Oh My gosh) have I met some interesting, wild-eyed, textured, musical people because of the guitar. It introduced me to people and their music from all over the world. But it's also true that our sweet-tempered, steel-stringed instrument crosses local cultural lines as well and puts you in touch with the most interesting people within 50 miles of home. It's a miracle: somebody gave (us) a guitar and the whole world said "hello!"

In keeping with the theme of guitars crossing cultural lines, how about some ideas to cross musical cultures; for example, let's play around in E today. The blues players like E for many great reasons. The open E chord is maybe the solidest chord on the guitar. And if you play all those flatted fifths and thirds as is typical in the blues, it's easy to find your way around in the key. I guess bluegrass players don't utilize it as much because the standard major scale is a bit harder to reach with all those sharps to play, and it's not deep in the tradition. But a couple of us spend a lot of time there; I'm one, and another is Uwe Kruger, who is very strong and fluent in E (and everywhere else). So let's look around in the open E territory, because "there be treasures thar, matey!" And we'll give our attention to the opportunities in E to enhance song accompaniment.

As I mention on the accompanying audio CD, one virtue of E is that as you fret only strings 5, 4, and 3: open strings 6, 2, and 1actually make a definable, no-third, E chord. So anything you play on 5, 4, and 3 that fits the key of E (including chords B, A, and D) will sound pretty played alongside or against those E definitional open strings of 6, 2, and 1. So here's the assignment: go find for yourself all the B, A, and D chords that you can find on only strings 5, 4, and 3. If you find them for yourself, you'll remember them, and as an added bonus you'll start to notice new things about the fingerboard that you hadn't thought of before. This is like the fingerpickers playing in DADGAD: fret a few strings and let a few remain open.

It's an example of my point that everybody teaches one's self how to play the guitar, even if you have a teacher, go to conservatory, and own all of Kaufman's and Crary's teaching materials. You still teach yourself, and one of the best strategies for advancing your playing is to make slight changes in the things you already know. This assignment to find the chords relevant to E yourself by hunting for them on strings 5, 4, and 3 will get you to notice many things about what it's like out there. Then when you have found these partial chords, substitute them, play them (along with open 6, 2, and 1) in place of the standard open position chords, and pay attention to how different they sound. Then try an arrangement where you sing a verse accompanied by the standard chords, then play a break, and then sing the next verse accompanied by these partial chords fretted on 5, 4, and 3, combined with the open 6, 2, and 1 strings.

It's a way to think about how to vary a piece of music in a beautiful way, and in a way that you thought up yourself. On the way to creating your own arrangements, all you need are some ideas for varying the things you already know. You already know the open chords in E; now you'll be able to make pretty, guitaristic, cross-tuning-like little changes that sound beautiful and put you in charge of the arrangement of a song.

Please let me know how these ideas work… you can reach me at www.dancrary.com, and I'm about to have a question feature up and running.

CD Highlight
Van Manakas: *Leavin' Tennessee*

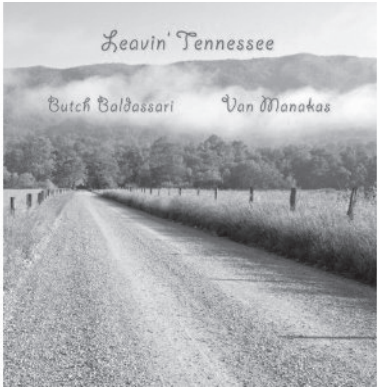
by Dan Miller

In January of 2009, the bluegrass world lost one of its shining stars when mandolin educator, promoter, performer, and recording artist Butch Baldassari passed away after a courageous two-year battle with an inoperable brain tumor. Although Butch is no longer with us, his spirit lives on through his recorded material. Last fall, one of the projects that Butch performed on and produced was finally released to the public after sitting on the shelf for a number of years. It is titled *Leavin' Tennessee* and Butch recorded it with his long-time friend, Van Manakas. It is a recording that all flat-pickers, mandolin players and fiddlers should own as part of their music collection. The project represents a very fine collection of fiddle tunes performed by some of Nashville's most highly skilled musicians.

If you have been a bluegrass or acoustic music enthusiast for any length of time, you will know of Butch Baldassari. You will also be familiar with Scott Vestal, the banjo player on Leavin' Tennessee, and will be quite impressed at the line-up of fiddle players on this recording: Stuart Duncan, Shad Cobb, Bobby Hicks and Barbara Lamb. Round that bunch out with Byron House on bass and you have a very impressive group of recording artists. If you are a fan of fiddle music, the line-up of fiddle players alone should be enough to immediately pique your interest in this recording.

With this awesome group of top-notch bluegrass performers, you may assume that they would pull in a guitarist of equal notoriety in the bluegrass world; however, even the most well-read and well-traveled flatpicking guitar fan may not be familiar with Van Manakas. Van's flatpicking shines and, as it turns out, so does his song-writing as he wrote ten of the recording's seventeen tunes. So, who is Van Manakas? I'll have to admit that I was unfamiliar with Van's work until I was made aware of this CD last fall, but once I heard the recording I thought, "Where has this guy been hiding?"

It turns out that Van has been living in his home state of New Jersey and he hasn't really been hiding but just been spending



the majority of his time working in other genres of music. After I had a chance to interview Van I discovered that even though he plays other styles of music to help put food on the table, he holds a big place in his heart for traditional flatpicking guitar music. *Leavin' Tennessee* is a testament to that. In the studio Van holds his own with Nashville's super-star fiddlers and he also writes tunes worthy of their time, energy and abilities.

Like many teenagers growing up in the 1960s, Van heard The Beatles' music and wanted to play the guitar. He started by learning how to play the rock music that was popular on the radio; however, fate stepped in and introduced him to music that did not often reach the ears of high school kids in New Jersey. One day at school a girl, whose father had recently passed away, asked Van, "You like music don't you?" It turns out that the girl's father had a record collection and she was looking for a music lover who might appreciate having that collection. Van said, "She brought over a car full of record albums that included recordings by Flatt & Scruggs, Reno & Smiley, Doc Watson and others. I went into my room with these records and I came out transformed. It changed my life."

The music that Van heard on those recordings inspired him to put rock music on the shelf and focus on learning how to play bluegrass. He loved the technical challenge that the music offered and said, "This music was a little exotic to me, coming from a different background, so I was drawn to it." Van didn't live too far from New York City so he started traveling into the city to see bluegrass performers as they came through town. He said, "There was a great bluegrass series in the city. Everyone came through and so I had the opportunity to see a lot of the first generation guys."

On one occasion Van had the opportunity to see Doc Watson perform and he spoke to Doc after the show. He said, "I asked Doc, 'How did you learn to play like that?' Doc responded, 'Old fashion practice.'" Van also had the opportunity to see Clarence White perform with The Byrds at a small college venue. He said, "Clarence was a huge influence and so I cornered him after the show and I asked him about his approach to using the pick, but Clarence was such an intuitive player, I don't know that he could explain it. I think he played that way out of the crib!"

A bit later Van also had the opportunity to pick with Tony Rice back when Tony was with J. D. Crowe. He said, "I was in a band that opened up for J. D. Crowe and I sat down and played a few tunes with Tony in the green room. After we played he said, 'You pick pretty good, but you've got to play louder.' He was right on the money."

In addition to seeing professional bluegrass musicians perform in New York venues, Van also started attending bluegrass festivals and meeting other bluegrass enthusiasts. One of those pickers was a young kid from Pennsylvania named Butch Baldassari. Van said, "I met Butch when we were in our late teens. We would always wind up at the same festivals." After high school Van attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston and bumped into Butch again there, which allowed their musical friendship to continue. Van graduated from the program at Berklee in 1976 with a degree in composition.

While he was studying at Berklee, Van became part of the thriving Boston music scene and got to know many of the area's professional performers, like Jack Tottle and Don Stover. His recording debut was with Jack Tottle on Jack's *Back Road Mandolin* project (1976). While in Boston, Van also got to know the folks at Rounder Records. He said, "Rounder had a vast library of recordings and they would let me come over and plow through it. It was a great education."

Van Manakas

Although Van continued to play bluegrass throughout his years in Boston, he "got serious about jazz" while at Berklee. By the time he was 21, he was on the road touring with jazz pianist Gil Evans, and by 1980 he had recorded a jazz record for Rounder titled *Physical* and then a second album in 1985 titled *Love Songs*. Reviewing *Love Songs*, *The Washington Post* wrote, "Van Manakas is an accomplished guitarist but it's his compositions that make his new album, *Love Songs*, so special. Though the album features no vocals, the seven Manakas originals are so memorable in melody and so eloquent in mood they deserve the album's title." *Guitar Player Magazine* wrote, "Although Manakas was somewhat of a bluegrass guitar legend in the Boston area, *Love Songs* finds him freely fusing jazz, rock, blues and other more exotic elements into music that's about as far from playing fiddle tunes as you can get."

During the mid-1980s, Van entered a musical partnership with pianist Scott Cossu that led to five recordings on the Windham Hill label and traveling the world performing with Cossu and other Windham Hill artists. Van said, "I spent a period playing with the Windham Hill people. They were all really good musicians, but eventually I found that the music wasn't fulfilling. Once you get bit by that high lonesome bug, it won't leave you alone. Had I been a better singer, I'm sure I would have never done anything else but bluegrass." After meeting up in Nashville with his old friend Butch Baldassari, Van realized how much he missed bluegrass music and in about 1992, he moved to Nashville.

Once in Nashville, Van got a lot of session work. He said, "I did some bluegrass stuff with Butch and I was playing country sessions on the Telecaster and also picking up a lot of jazz work. It was a good place for me to be because I could use a lot of my skill sets. I had two small children at the time and so doing the session work was better than living on a band bus." During his years in Nashville, Van also recorded three more solo albums, *Letters From the Equator* (1992), *Mountain* (1995), and *American Guitar* (2000).

When asked about his first flatpicking influences, Van said that back in his high school days he first was inspired by Doc Watson and spent a lot of time slowing down Doc's recordings. Van added, "I ruined a lot of records that way. I'd slow down the record and learn a little bit at a time. I can still hear some of those phrases in my playing today." Van was also influenced by Norman Blake and Clarence White. He said, "Clarence has been an influence on both acoustic and electric guitar. He was my mentor on the electric guitar because he still had that high lonesome sound and used flatpicking concepts. It was not a big processed sound."

In addition to playing guitar, Van became a "closet fiddler" and reflects, "I think that playing the fiddle informed my guitar playing. It taught me how to better put the music on the guitar and how to get the fiddle tune feel. Guitar players generally learn from other guitar players. I think that a little gets lost in the translation. There are interesting rhythms that a fiddler performs with the bow that I was able to bring over to the guitar after I started to learn how to play the fiddle."

Just before Van left Nashville to return to New Jersey in 2003 he decided to record a flatpicking fiddle tune record. He said, "I have always loved Kenny Baker's records. They are the definition of soul in fiddle music. They are like vitamins. No one had tone like that. His songs were loose, but led by the melody. I had always wanted to make a guitar recording that had the feel of Kenny's fiddle records. I was in Nashville with all of these great players and I thought, 'Now is the time.' I'm a fiddle fan and I wanted to hear the fiddle tunes that I had written juxtaposed against the playing of these fiddle players that I liked."

Reviews of Van's solo projects consistently praise his ability to compose memorable melodies. Regarding his approach to composing fiddle music, Van said, "It is very difficult to write a fiddle tune that will stand up next to a traditional war horse. That is the biggest challenge. With this recording, we wanted to make a traditional sounding record with modern elements. To make a new tune sound traditional, but still have your own stamp on it, is difficult. What I love about bluegrass is that it is very emotional, but not in a fake way. I wanted to get that kind of vibe on this recording. I wasn't interested in selling a bunch of records, it was just something that was important for me to do."

Leavin' Tennessee is a very fine album in all aspects. There are seventeen instrumental tunes presented on the recording, ten of which were written by Van. The other seven tunes include fiddle tune standards such as "Cotton Patch Rag," "Bluegrass in the Backwoods," "I Am A Pilgrim," "Fiddler's Dream," "Bitter Creek," and "Yellow Barber." Of the seventeen tunes most are up tempo, but there are also three very nice waltzes. Overall, I feel like Van accomplished his goal of writing original fiddle music that sounded like it was traditional. Had I not had the liner notes, I may have had a difficult time figuring out which tunes were new and which were not.

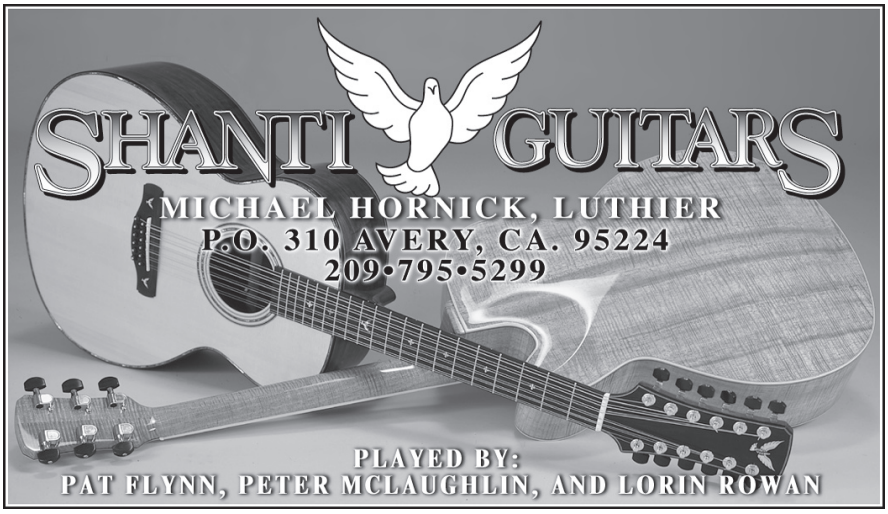
While the majority of these tunes have a traditional fiddle tune feel, there are a few that also dip into the realm of jazz

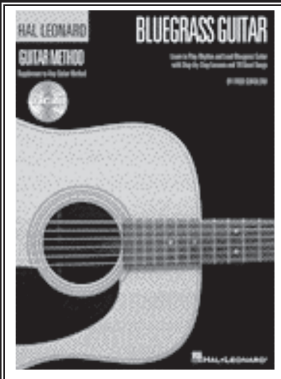
and swing, as fiddlers are inclined to do from time to time. My favorites of the Van Manakas originals are "Arapaho," "Spider Waltz," and "Indian Echo."

Van's guitar kicks off every tune and his first solo is very melody oriented. He gets more adventurous on later passes. He said, "I played the first pass straight and deconstructed the melody a bit after that." There were several aspects of this recording that kept my attention. The first was being able to discover all of these great new fiddle tune melodies. After listening to Van's first pass on the guitar, the next thing that was very captivating was listening to what these great fiddle players did with this melody. Thirdly, after listening to Van's straightforward melodic version on the first pass, it was very interesting to listen to what he did with the melody when he took his second solo. It provided a very pleasurable listening experience throughout.

These days Van remains "out of the bluegrass pocket"; however, he still dabbles in bluegrass by picking occasionally with guys like Bill Keith and Andy Statman. He said that he and Andy have been performing together and may eventually record a project together. When he performs with Andy, half of their set is Monroe style mandolin tunes and for the other half Andy picks up the clarinet and plays Klezmer music. Van said he performs all of it on his 1946 Martin D-18 because, "There is no joy like an old D-18 and a microphone." Van also performs with a local New Jersey bluegrass band a few times a month and continues to be involved in studio sessions that cover a wide range of music.

If you are looking for some great new fiddle tune melodies to explore on your guitar, I highly recommend that you check out *Leavin' Tennessee*. You'll find some very fine new stuff to learn. However, since most of our readers seem to be interested in learning tunes that they can take out to their local jam session and pick with their jamming buddies, we decided to provide you with Van's arrangement of the traditional tune "Cotton Patch Rag." You will find Van's transcription starting on the next page and you can hear Van play this tune, along with Butch Baldassari, Scott Vestal, Byron House, and Bobby Hicks, on this issue's audio companion. Enjoy!





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Cotton Patch Rag

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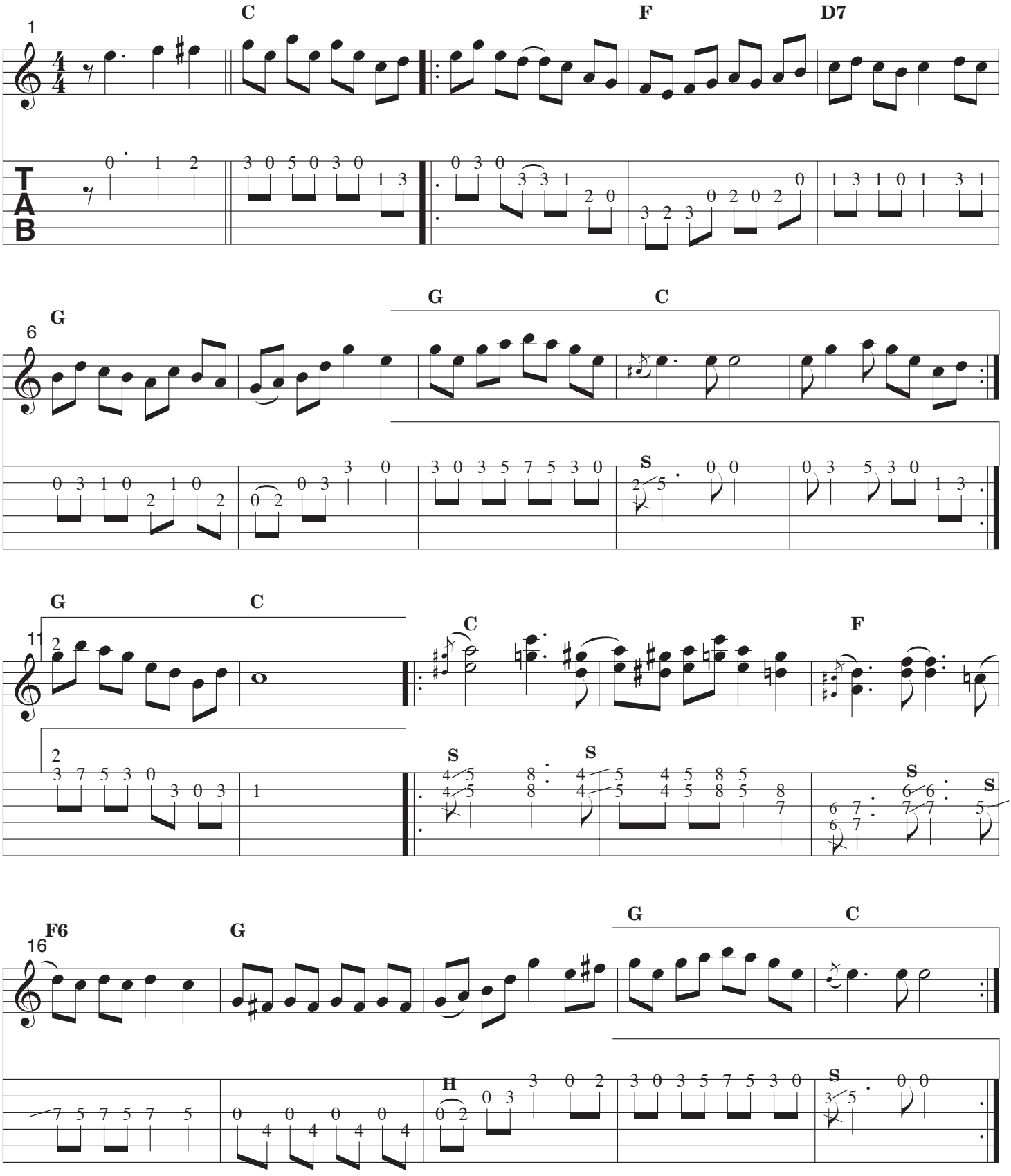
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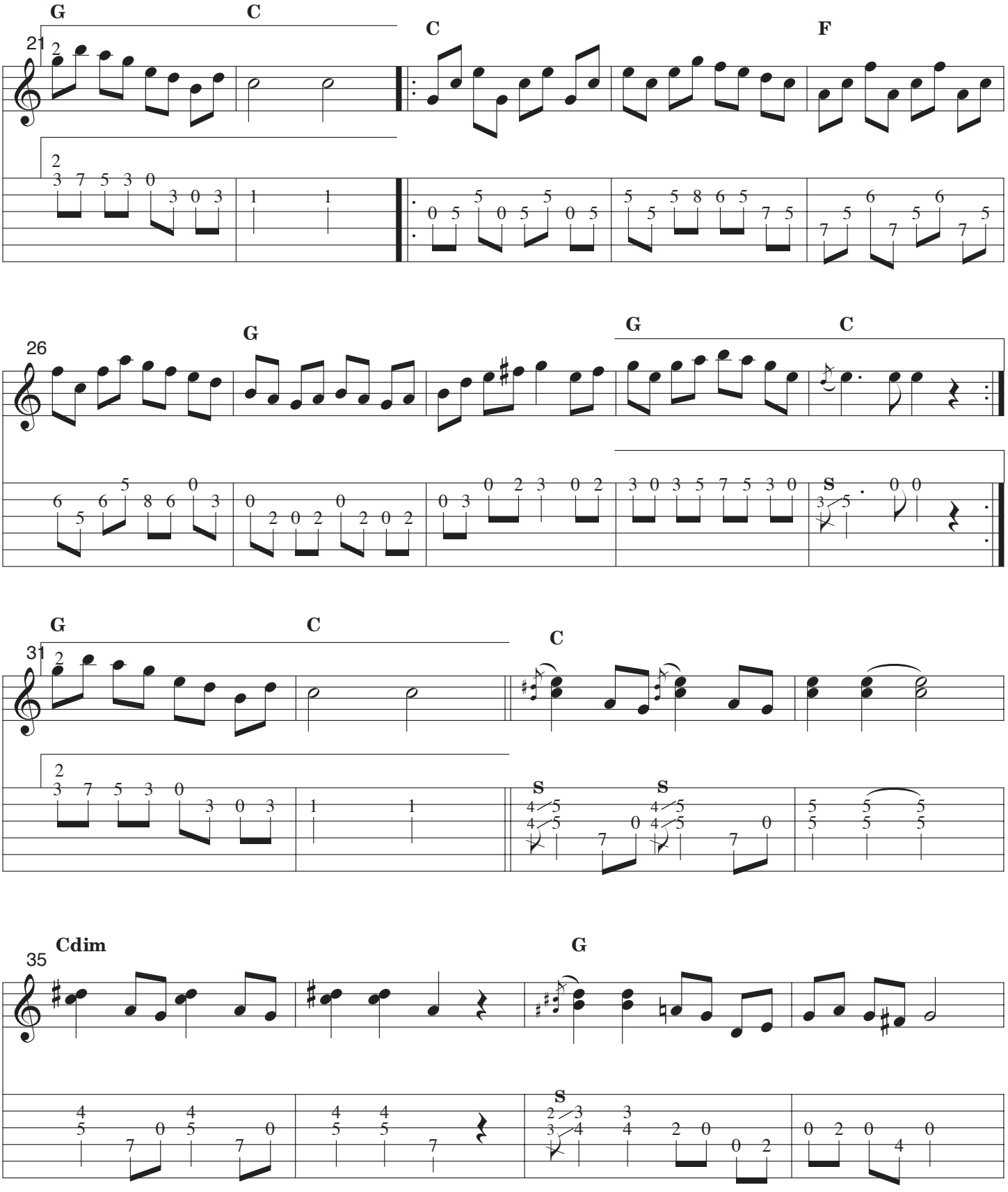
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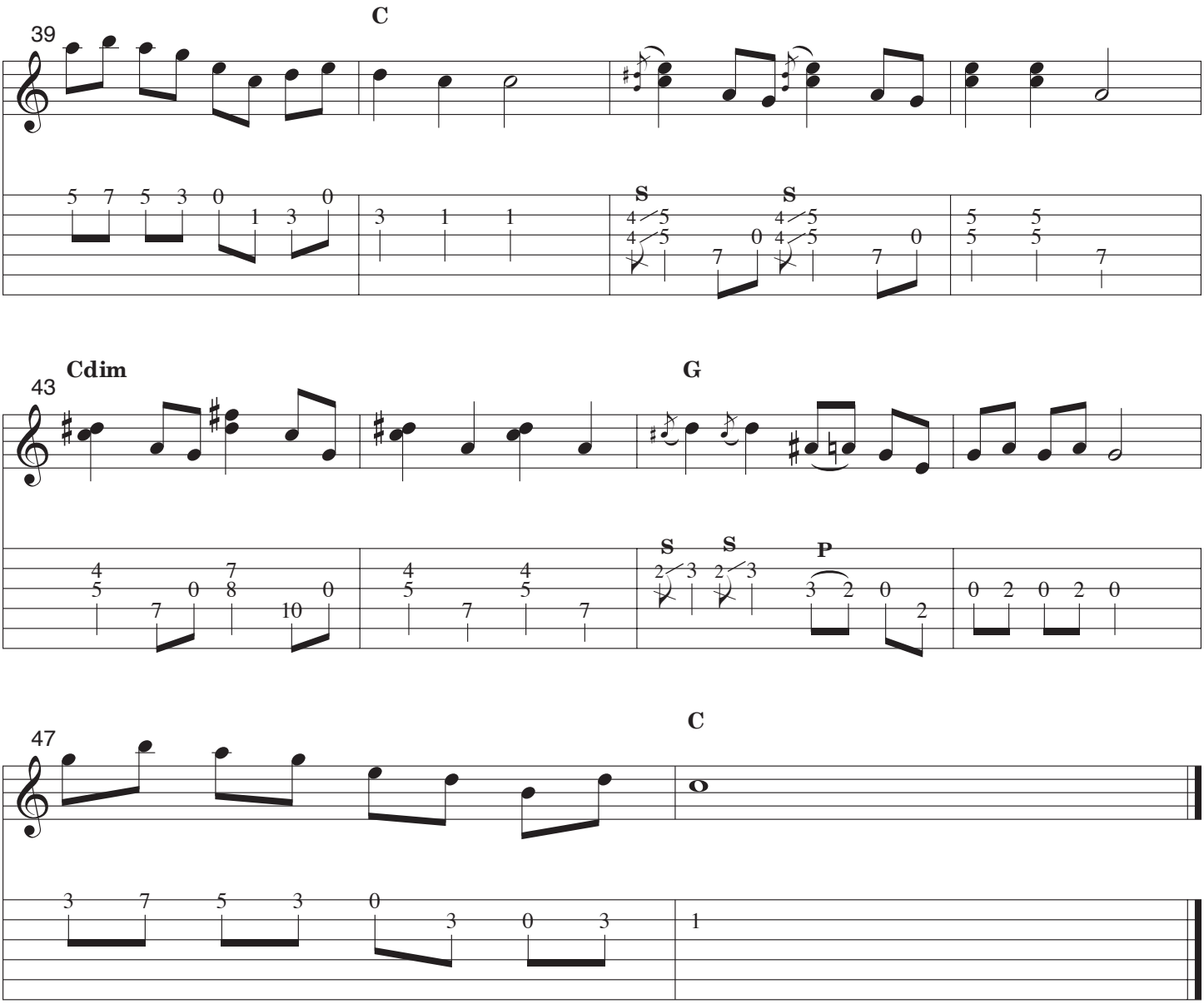
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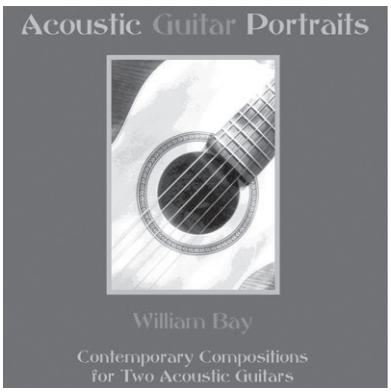


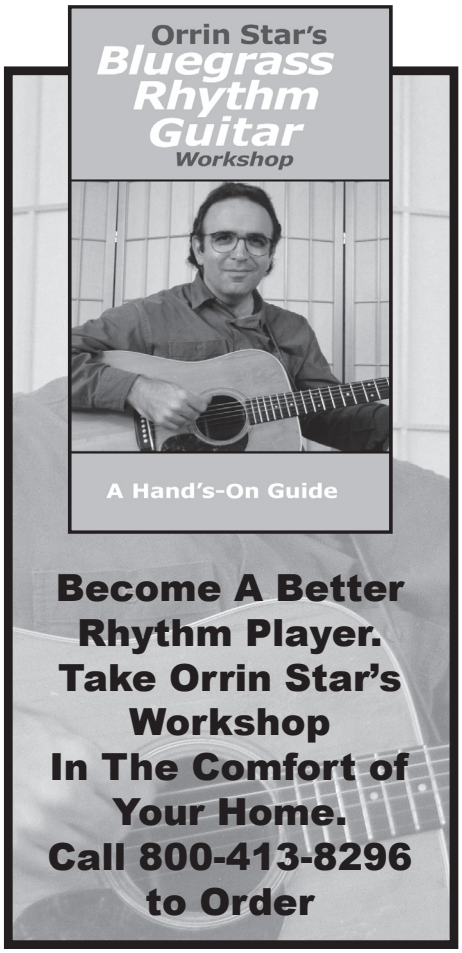
Reviewed by Joe Carr

As an experienced player of and listener to guitar music, I have developed certain opinions and expectations when I listen. For example, I generally analyze a piece of music as to form whether it is country, folk, bluegrass, jazz, gypsy, rock or some type of world music. In some ways, I have become somewhat jaded when I listen and while I might marvel at how well played a certain section is or the beautiful tone a given player gets, I none the less, am seldom surprised by the form of tunes or the chord progressions. I long for the time before I knew as much about music as I do now. I can only imagine now the excitement I felt as a youngster when I first heard music and reacted to the sound alone. With no understanding of what I was hearing, I was free to react to and enjoy what I heard simply based on the sound.

I assumed this experience was lost to me forever until William Bay's new album arrived in the mailbox. Readers may know Bay is the son of music publishing icon Mel Bay. Until recently, he stayed very busy as the CEO of Mel Bay Publishing. While he contributes a regular column to *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, he hasn't had a lot of time to devote to guitar playing. With his sons Collin and Bryndon now at the reins of Mel Bay, he has found time to produce this new CD.

But back to the album. This generous album (over an hour!) contains 15 original acoustic guitar instrumentals in Bay's unique style. In his liner notes, Bay quotes a friend as saying "I really don't know how to categorize your music." I can only agree. These acoustic sound palettes feature beautiful chords, interesting interplay between two guitars and forms that defy any expected patterns. By the third tune, I found myself just letting the music flow over me. All concepts such as verse, chorus and bridge went out the window and I just listened without expectation.

You may never learn any of the tunes on this album, but it is a terrific "palette cleanser" to rest your ears from a constant diet of "Blackberry Blossom" played at interstellar speeds. AND if you put this on quietly at your next get-together, your spouse, who generally dislikes your favorite albums, may ask you to turn it up. Recommended.



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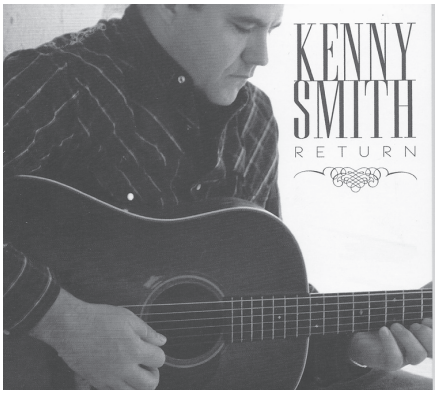

Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

It's been 15 years since an "emerging hot guitarist" named Kenny Smith recorded *Studebaker*, which immediately became a standard in most guitarists' CD collection. In the intervening years, Smith has solidified his position in the upper echelon of acoustic guitarists of our age, first through his work with Lonesome River Band and then with the Kenny & Amanda Smith Band. In that sense, the release of *Return* marks another milestone in his career as a "solo" artist (apart from his work in the band setting).

As Kenny writes in the CD booklet: "…I asked a lot of my students/guitar fanatics/people afflicted with a good dose of guitar poisoning, what kind of guitar project would you like to hear next? The overwhelming response was that they wanted a project fill of old fiddle tunes with some originals mixed in." An artist should meet his audience's expectation; but with Smith, exceeding expectations is more the norm.

To accomplish this, Smith assembled some stellar musicians, some of whom also appeared on *Studebaker*. Barry Bales (bass) and Adam Steffy (mandolin) both return, now accompanied by Jim Denman (5-string banjo), Adam Hurt (clawhammer banjo), Aubrey Haynie (fiddle), and special guests Zachary McLamb, Trent Callicut, and Spencer Strickland (from the Kenny & Amanda Smith Band) on the Smith original tune "Model A."

And just as requested, this 14-cut project nicely balances original Smith tunes ("Warren Chapel," "Rising Fawn," and "Model A") against standard fiddle tunes ("Cumberland Gap," "Leather Britches," "Arkansas Traveler," "Sail Away Ladies," "Forked Deer," and "Billy in the Lowground"). Added for good measure are Tommy Jackson's "Acorn Hill Breakdown" and Tommy Magnese's "Black Mountain Rag," Closing the CD – reminiscent of how *Studebaker* closed – is a slow acoustic version of "Jesus Loves Me." And although every tune encourages repeated listenings, I was particular impressed by the sheer exuberant originality of the two Denman tunes, "Half Step" and "Getaway."

One of the characteristics of Smith's style is to maximize the resonance of his guitar. For *Return*, Kenny has assembled as notable a cast of instruments as musicians. This is immediately evident on the cover of the CD: he's playing the Norman Blake 1933 shaded top D-28S. Kenny shares his appreciation of these instruments by devoting three pages of the CD booklet to photos and descriptions of the guitars used on this CD: a 1935 prototype of the Gibson Advanced Jumbo, Kenny's 1935 Martin D-18, and Blake's 1933 D-28S (loaned to Smith for this project by Gary Burnette, who also provided the Gibson). On the notes for the tunes, Kenny indicates which guitar he uses on which tunes, which just encourages you to go back for more listening.

Finally, special production kudos must go to Glenn Tabor, who co-produced (with Smith) this album. Tabor (owner of Gat3 Productions) has a history of working with Kenny and Amanda, and has produced as acoustically transparent a recording as I've had the pleasure of hearing in a long time.

In summary: if you have *Studebaker* you owe it to yourself to get *Return*. And be sure to memorize those guitar details: you never know when there's going to be a quiz.

Return is now available at www.flatpickingmercantile.com

Tune List: Half Step; Warren Chapel; Cumberland Gap; Getaway; Rising Fawn; Acorn Hill Breakdown; Leather Britches; Model A; Sail Away Ladies; Forked Deer; Billy in the Lowground; Black Mountain Rag; Jesus Loves Me

How to practice: Goal Setting
by Bradley Carter

You've got your instrument. You take it out of it's case. The smell of the instrument is magical. How great it would be to sit down and play music for hours! Maybe you'd like to sit around the campfire belting our some tunes with your friends. Perhaps you hope to make first chair in your school orchestra. Maybe you imagine yourself as a performer up on stage in front of the bright lights. Or maybe you just want to sit quietly alone and make music only for yourself. No matter what your ambition the same rules apply if you hope to improve…and the first rule is you've got to practice if you hope to get better. I'm really good at stating the obvious. This might seem like an unnecessary point to make. It's not.

If you want to improve you need to practice. It has become generally accepted that to get really good at anything you need to practice it for around 10,000 hours. That breaks down to about 2.7 hours a day for 10 years. That's every single day, 365 days a year. This may be a little overwhelming to get a handle on. Clearly playing well takes time. However, if you never learn how to practice, even 30,000 hours later, you may still be at the same level with your playing.

The thing about music is that getting better at playing music means you have to get better at practicing music. They are the same thing. If you don't learn how to practice better you won't get better at playing. It's very simple really. A devotion to improving your playing should start with a decision to understanding what practice is and what the best way to approach it is. I know I was frustrated for years. I worked harder and harder but somehow my playing just kind of stayed the same.

What practice is. What playing is.

Let's get a few things clear right from the start. Practicing and playing are not the same thing. I think both are important in a musicians development but a distinction needs to be made. Practice is making the decision to improve something specific in your playing. Playing can be anything from jamming your favorite song of the moment, noodling a few notes from a scale, lick, or song, or it could be making noise with no focus whatsoever. Practice is narrowing your focus to a specific goal or set of goals and maintaining a focus only on that goal. Playing doesn't need to have a goal other than getting your instrument in your hands and getting it to make sounds.

To put it another way, practice is playing with the intent of improving an element of one's musicianship. This is where many people go astray. Here's a typical scenario. A music student goes to take a lesson. The teacher says, "Here's some music to go home and practice." The student goes home and tries to play the assigned music. Since the student doesn't really know how to practice they never quite get it just right. They go back to the teacher and the teacher says "OK, well you need to practice some more. Here's another song to work on." The student works on another song that they don't quite get. Now the student can sort of play two songs. By this point they are no longer practicing when they play these songs. They're just playing, and perhaps what they play doesn't sound so hot.

Perhaps the student starts to feel like they're not really good at music. They feel like they're missing some ingredient in their DNA that prevents them from playing well.

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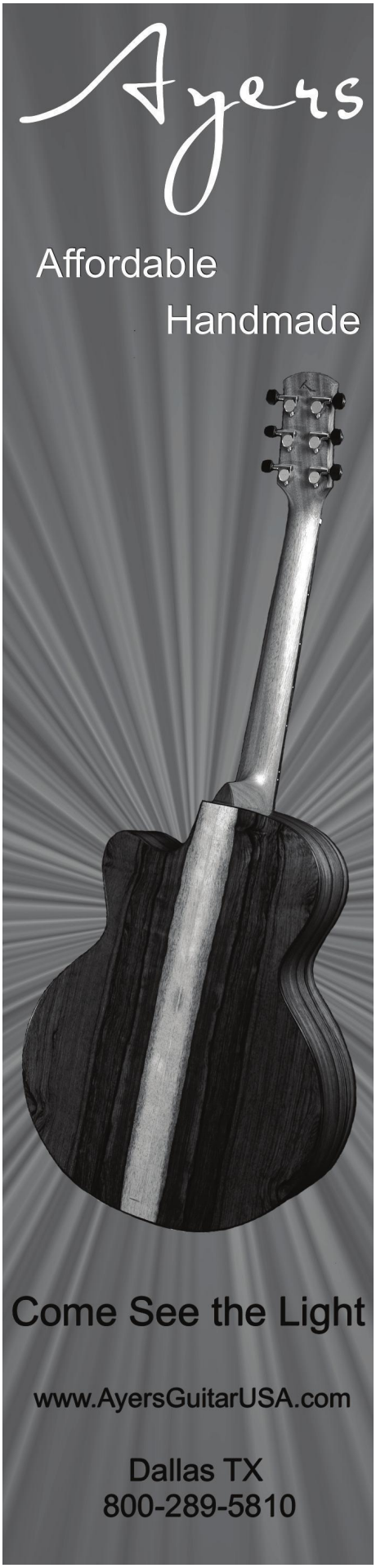

This is an unfortunate and pervasive notion in society today. At this point the student may not strive to go much further with their music. Maybe they keep learning songs but they never understand the method to improve their skills. Maybe they give up altogether.

I took several lessons with guitarists that I admired and not one of them told me how to get better. I even had one tell me that my left hand technique needed work but made no mention of what was wrong and how I should fix it. In fact, my first few banjo lessons were exactly like how I described in the above scenario. I learned all the material as best I could but I had no idea how to practice it "properly."

How did the folks I went to for lessons learn to play so well? Perhaps these teachers simply didn't know how to practice either. It is possible they had been taught so well they never got into any of the "bad habits" you so often hear about. Good practice was so elementary to them they assumed all that practice stuff was obvious. Perhaps they just weren't good communicators. Maybe they just didn't care whether their music students learned how to play well or not.

First rule of practice: SET A GOAL

If you're not setting a goal you're not practicing. It's that simple really. That doesn't mean that I set a goal every time I pick up an instrument. I've spent countless hours just messing about with songs that I like to play or wish that I could play. I don't regret how that time was spent. I even have memories of goofing off with the guitar or banjo trying to figure out some lick or chord. Playing music should be fun if nothing else and that stuff is great fun for me, but it ain't practice.

Remember that practice is the intent to improve some element of your musicianship. If you have intent to improve then you need to focus that intent somewhere. This is where goals setting comes in. Goals for each practice session need to be small and easy to manage. In the same way that you should learn fingerings in small easy to digest bits you should choose small easy to manage goals that you are likely to make successful.

It's easy to get overwhelmed with the size of the challenge one is faced with when learning to play. This is natural and a feeling many struggle to overcome. Instead of getting overwhelmed by the enormity of a challenge, focus on one small aspect that you can easily handle. I like to set 5 minute goals for myself in a given practice session.

Let's say for example that you are learning to play the major scale. The major scale is often a jumping off point for many instrumentalists, but its not easy to play. No matter what your instrument you may have trouble playing up and down the scale at first. Instead of trying to play the whole scale, set your goal smaller and only play the first two or three notes. Play up and down those three notes only. This is a more manageable amount to deal with. You'll find that after practicing only these three notes you'll really see some improvement.

Once you start to feel comfortable playing those three notes add a note or two. Ease into playing the new notes slowly and focus your attention on making sure everything feels smooth and strong. At this point you've been very clear about your goals. Your first goal was the first 3 notes of the major scale. Once you have improved at that goal you can add a couple notes and make the first 5 notes of the scale your goal. Over time you'll be able to add the rest of the notes of the scale. Eventually you can start introducing more musical patterns and motifs into playing the scale and that will become your goal.

Remember, stick to small easy to manage goals. Easily attainable in 5 minutes or less. Even if you're working on a Bach Partita or "Old Joe Clark" you should maintain your focus on small manageable goals that build on each other.

Practicing should place a great deal of focus on elements of your music that aren't good. Work on things that are in need of improvement. It can be great fun to sit down and play a song you've played a hundred times before, but it's not practice. Practice goes after weak points, reinforcing what you already play well won't improve you as a musician.

Practicing is a constantly evolving process. It should not be the same each time. To grow you need to keep tweaking and adjusting your routine. In fact practice should never be considered routine. It's about evaluating where you are musically and making an honest assessment of what you need to do to get where you want to go. Then move in that direction.

It is absolutely possible to get better at music every time you practice. Every time! You start your practice at point A and when you get to point B you have somehow improved your playing. A thoughtful approach to improving your practice habits will allow you to make improvements every time.

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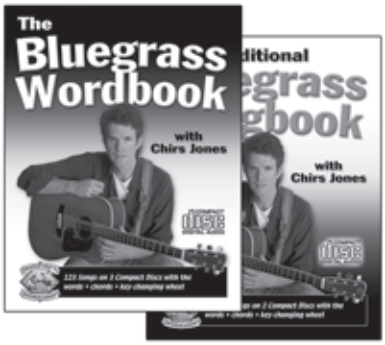

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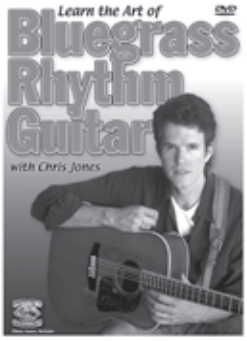

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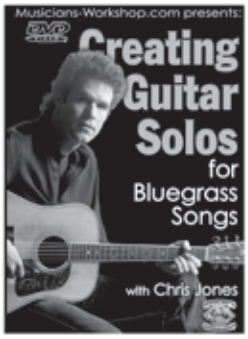

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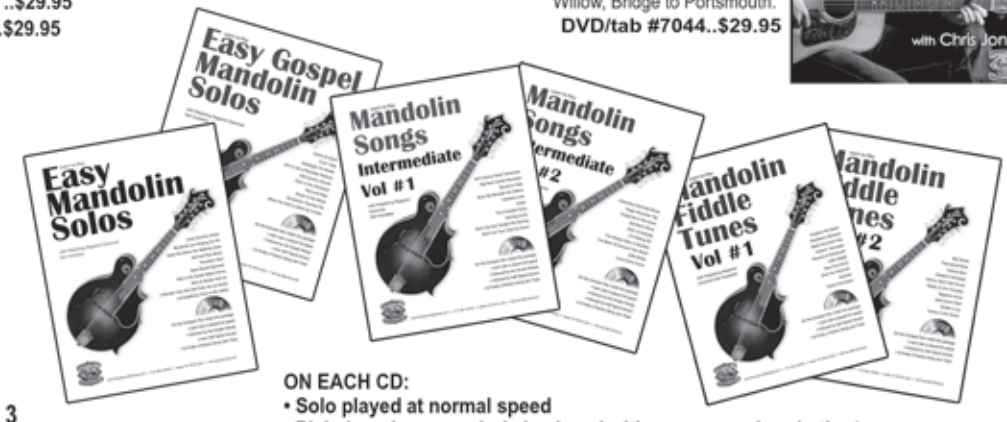

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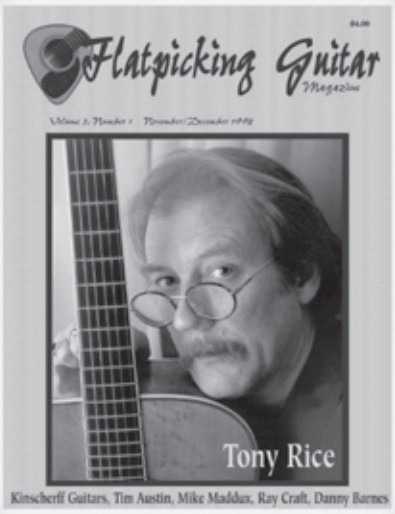

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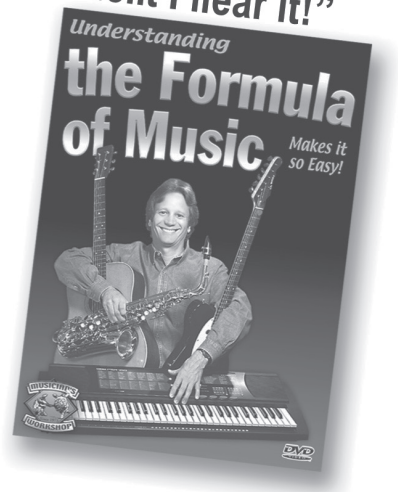

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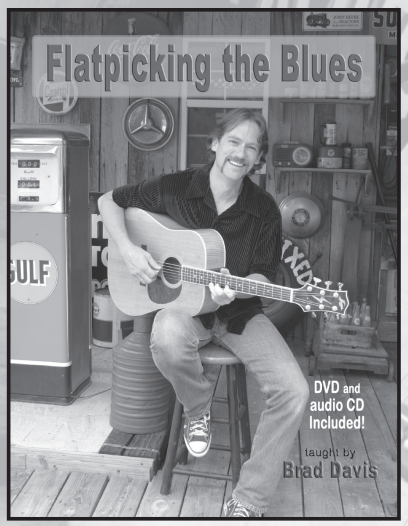

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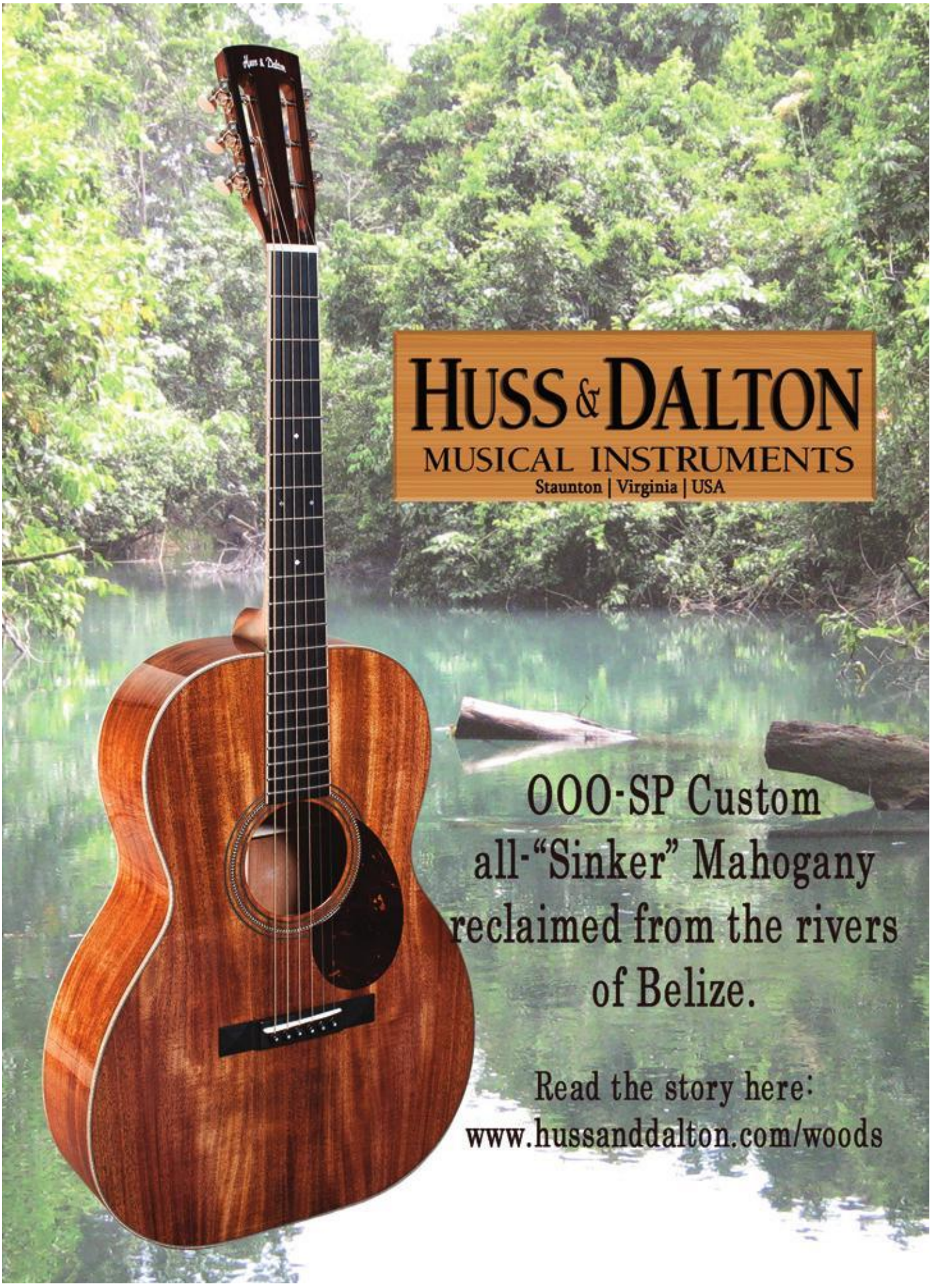
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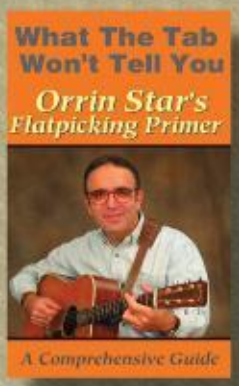

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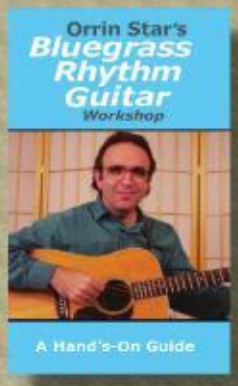

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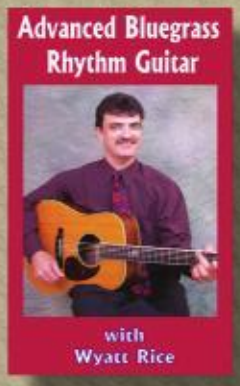

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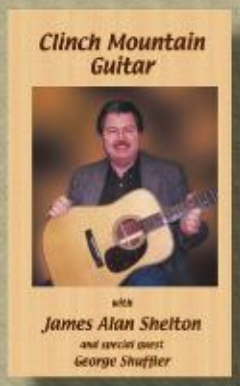
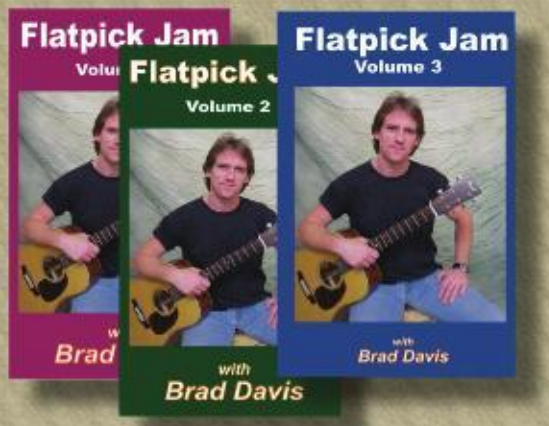


Clinch Mountain Guitar
Video
with James Shelton



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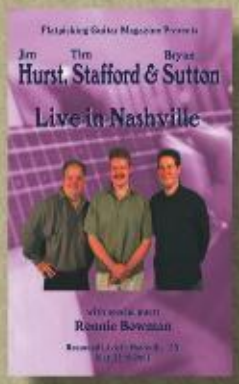
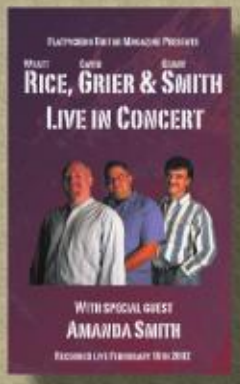
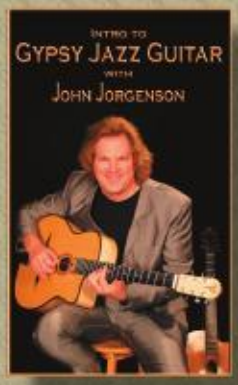


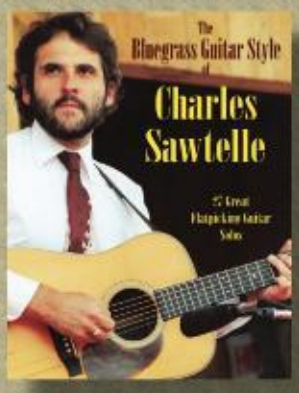
Hurst, Stafford & Sutton
Concert Performance
On DVD or Video



Rice, Grier & Smith
Concert Performance
On DVD or Video



Gypsy Jazz Guitar
Video or DVD
with John Jorgenson



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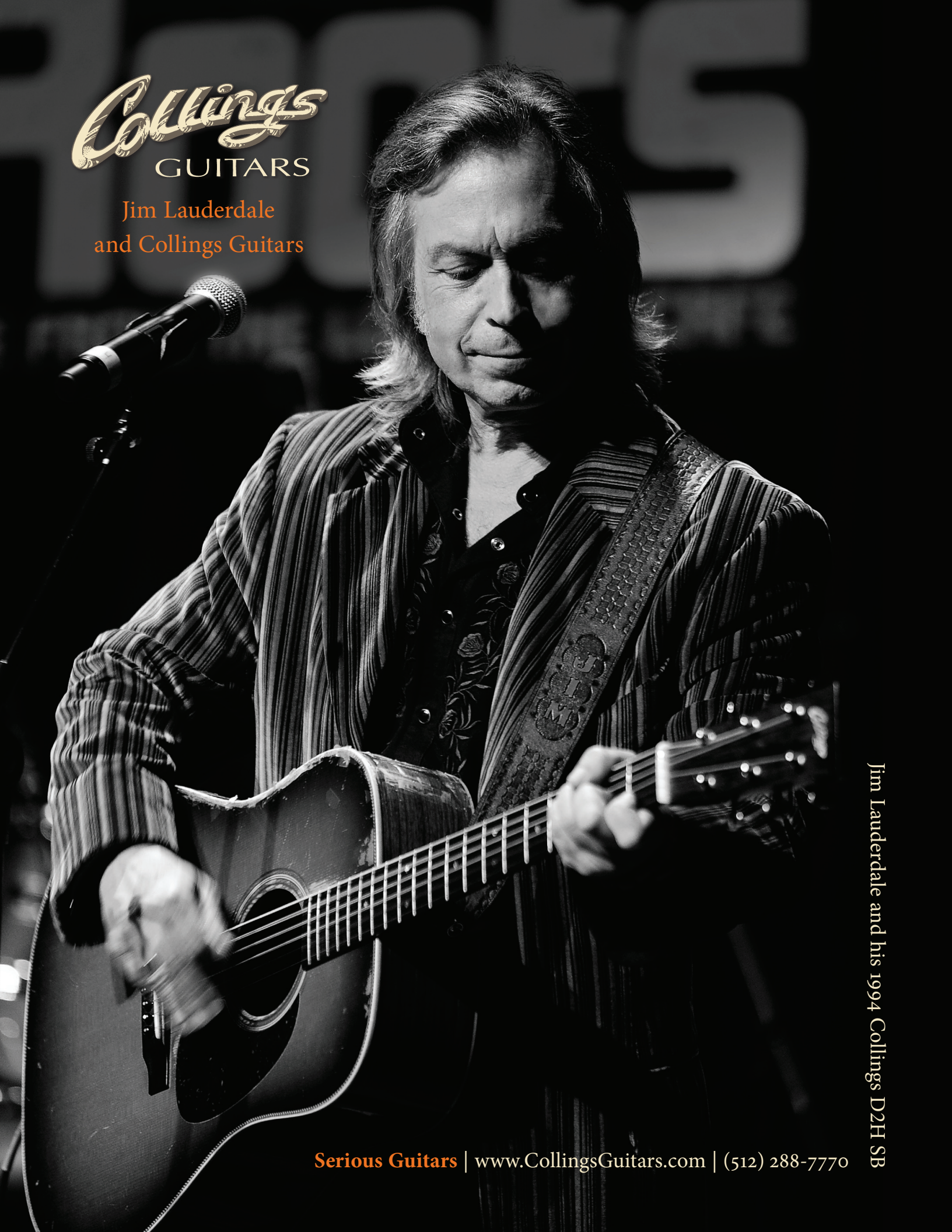
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